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THE NEW TEEN TITANS

THE NEW MUTANTS

SUPERMAN

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

X-MEN

BATMAN

THE Fantastic Four

DAREDEVIL

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Fans love to talk of the intricacies of linework and compare the relative merits of their favorite artists. They can spend hours of heated debate supporting the work of their favorite writers. But if you really want to start the fur flying, just ask a group of fans who their favorite superhero is! When it comes to the one true love of every comic book fan, you just have to look to the characters, to the heroes that make the whole thing work.

It is the superheroes that are the central focus of a modern comic book. You will rarely see a comic book named after its writer or artist, and almost never find one that uses the name of its story for its title. Almost every single one bears the name of its featured hero prominently in its title. Even if the name is **The Adventures of Superman** or **Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-Man**, it is very obvious who the featured player is. No actor or actress ever had it so good.

Since virtually every comic book fan loves to discuss his or her favorite superhero, and to read about them too since **COMICS FEATURE**'s Heroes column consistently ranks as a reader favorite, it was only natural that we would gather the histories of some of the most popular costumed crusaders into their own book. We hope that you will enjoy reading, or rereading, about your favorite superhero as much as all of us enjoyed presenting them.

And don't hesitate to write and tell us what you think of this special. If enough of you demand it we can always create a second volume, or even one about the dark side of the comic book, the villains. When you write please be sure to send us suggestions as to which heros/villains you would most like to read about and why; tell us what you think makes that character special, a standout in the four color world. The most interesting letters will appear in the pages of **COMICS FEATURE**.

COMICS FEATURE presents

SUPER HEROES™

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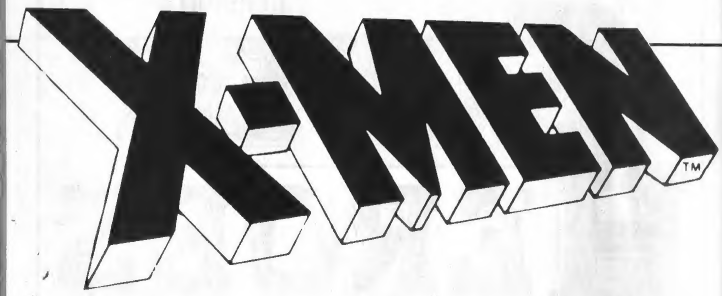

He had a group, an idea, a story, but he didn't have a name; at least he didn't have a name which the publisher liked.

When Stan Lee conceived The X-Men, it was because he wanted to create a new super team comprised of characters who were born with their abilities, rather than acquiring them through some far-fetched accident. Taking the biological concept of the mutant, something which shows a variation not found in its parents, Stan had come up with a new direction that he had been looking for. He'd even settled on a title for the book: **The Mutants.** The only problem was that then-publisher Martin Goodman thought it was too obscure a word and that the little kids who bought comic books wouldn't understand what it meant. Lee's arguments that there was a wider audience that he was aiming at while still retaining the interest of the bubblegum brigade, fell on deaf ears. Examining what a mutant was, he defined it has having something extra. A mutant could be considered as being an extraordinary human, or in commercial comic book shorthand, an X-man.

This gave the book an air of mystery which probably helped it when it first appeared in the summer of '63, although the fact that it appeared on the stands along with **Avengers #1** and the first Fantastic Four annual couldn't have hurt either.

While the first issue was certainly interesting, and the introduction of Magneto (who has been to the X-Men what Dr. Doom has been to the Fantastic Four) made for a great start, what with Kirby's striking costume design, the book just wasn't as different as it seemed. It didn't take too discerning a fan to realize that the characters were offshoots of the F.F. Instead of a flaming character, there was an icy one. There was even a homely, super-strong character who used a lot of slang, as well as a super-intelligent group leader. But fans quickly picked up on something else as well. The X-Men were conceived around late '62, about the time that DC published **My Greatest Adventure #80** which introduced "The Doom Patrol," strange characters (although **not** mutants) who'd been brought together by a mysterious wheelchair-bound genius. The coincidence seemed a little too close, although no more was done or said when DC introduced The Swamp Thing right after Marvel did the Man-Thing. These things happen.

The first eleven issues of **The X-Men** were drawn by Jack Kirby, and other than a nagging reuse of The Brotherhood of Evil Mutants in numbers 4, 5, 6 and 7, they were an interesting run, climaxing in #10 which introduced Ka-Zar and the Savage Land in a rousing adventure which took place all in one issue. Although Kirby did one more issue, almost anything would seem an anti-climax after everything Kirby came up with in #10.

While the title lasted for years after Kirby left it, it seemed to be searching for itself, never certain which direction to go or what to do with the characters as they moved from one adventure to another which usually impacted very little on them as human beings. There were exceptions, though.

Before Stan Lee left the book as writer with #20 (when Roy Thomas replaced him), Prof. X's half-brother Cain Marko (the Juggernaut) was introduced in #12 and #14 brought on The Sentinels, the latter being as closely identified with the X-Men as anything anyone ever did in the series.

X-MEN

By this time the character of the Beast had been altered so that he was an intelligent, eloquent personality rather than a Ben Grimm clone. Thus the original X-Men included Professor X (who was killed off by Thomas in #42 and brought back by him in #65), Cyclops (who fires powerful optic blasts and is little different today than when he was introduced in 1963 when he was called "Slim" Summers, a nickname that was quickly dropped), Iceman (Bobby Drake, who could ice up his body and whose origin appeared in issues #44-46), the Angel (whose sole power is that of flight due to his wings and whose origin appeared in #14), the Beast (Hank McCoy who underwent a metamorphosis in **Amazing Adventures #11** into a blue-furred character who then went on to become involved with the Avengers and later the Defenders as had both Iceman and The Angel), Marvel Girl (Jean Grey, who died in #100 only to be reborn as Phoenix, whose powers dwarfed those she previously had and who then went out of control as Dark Phoenix).

IF EVEN ONE MORE PERSON DIED AT MY HANDS...
IT'S BETTER THIS WAY. QUICK. CLEAN. FINAL.
I LOVE YOU, SCOTT!
A PART OF ME WILL ALWAYS BE WITH YOU.
JEAN, NO, DON'T!
NO!
SCOTT!
JEAN!

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There were other part-time X-Men such as the Mimic who first fought them in #19, and then reformed to join the group in #27-29 until he lost his power.

Alex Summers (Havok) first turned up in #54 and although he fought alongside the X-Men after learning to control his power, he was never formally a member and turns up only now and then.

The original X-Men had some interesting high points such as numbers 50 and 51 which were drawn by Jim Steranko, but the most memorable issues were at the end of the original run when Roy Thomas scripted and Neal Adams pencilled numbers 56-63 and 65. Tom Palmer inked, and even when Don Heck did #64 as a fill-in issue, it was drawn to imitate Adams so amazingly that you have to look twice at it to see that it's merely a fine imitation. Those last few issues brought the X-Men together in one gripping story after another which balanced character and plot in a manner more familiar with what would be done in the book under Chris Claremont years later. The art is some of Neal Adams most enervating work and he also plotted #65, which formed a moving climax to the run. (These Adams issues were reprinted by Marvel in a special high quality format available only in comic shops). The run lasted one more issue, but even with the Hulk as a guest star the book seemed dead on its feet after the high energy impact of the Thomas/Adams issues.

Several months later the title was revived as a reprint book, ostensibly to keep the characters active in some form due to undisclosed plans that Marvel had for them.

Whatever those plans were, they were kicked around, abandoned and changed until 4½ years later **Giant Size X-Men #1** appeared in 1975 (recently reprinted in a special quality edition available in comic shops).

Marvel had come up with the idea that if they could put together a team composed of characters from many nations, that they'd have a big hit in the overseas market. Roy Thomas suggested the X-Men as an ideal format for this and the team underwent revisions. Although Prof. X was still the ever-present mentor, it was decided to keep Cyclops in order to have some tie between the new X-Men and the old X-Men. It was also felt that he was the most interesting member of the old team due to his tragic overtones in that he could never look at another human being with his unshielded eyes.

The new X-Men were gathered together by Prof. X in **Giant Size #1**. They consisted of Nightcrawler (who can teleport), Wolverine, (a Canadian who was originally part of what would become known as Alpha Flight but who quit to become a free agent when Xavier offered him the chance to employ his heightened senses and adamantium plated skeleton which was

I GOT HIM, BIG FELLA!
I WAS HOPIN' FOR A KILL--BUT AT LEAST HE WON'T BE FLYING ANY-TIME SOON.
THE SUCKER'S CRIPPLED, COLOSSUS. LOWER THE BOOM!
THAT, TOVARISCH, WILL BE A PLEASURE!
KRAKOW
NO!

once referred to as solid adamantium until someone pointed out that human bones manufacture the body's blood supply), Storm (an orphan who grew up in the wilds of Kenya, East Africa and who as a child lived as a thief in the streets until maturing into a locally worshipped goddess due to her control of weather), Colossus (aka Peter Rasputin, a Russian who uses his ability to turn his body into something akin to armor plating for international benefit after being convinced by Professor X), Thunderbird (an American Indian, on borrowed time from the start as he was created solely to be killed off in his third outing in **X-Men #95** as his powers and personality were similar to those of Wolverine which would have made him a sort of fifth wheel) and Sprite (also known as Ariel and Kitty Pryde, the newest and youngest X-Man, who, at only fourteen, is possessed of the ability to phase through solid objects much as the Vision of the Avengers can).

Len Wein, who essentially created the new X-Men, was only involved with the title for the first couple stories and then left the book. Chris Claremont was involved with the writing beginning with **X-Men #94**, the second story of the new X-Men.

The artist on the new X-Men up through issue #107 was Dave Cockrum. His approach to the X-Men was quite different from either John Byrne or Paul Smith and his work on the early issues suffers only in comparison to the more slick approach brought to the book later. Len Wein conceived these new X-Men as being teenagers and this is how Cockrum drew them. Claremont later decided their ages should be more varied, but when Cockrum returned to the title for several months beginning with #145, he drew them all like teenagers again which made it all seem very awkward. Whether for this reason or

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post-Byrne depression, sales slumped until Paul Smith took over the title [a 50,000 copy jump was recorded with his first issue], although Smith left to be replaced by John Romita, Jr.

Chris Claremont began putting the new X-Men through changes almost from the start, but it was when John Byrne began his long stint on the title [#108-143] that the book really came alive as this team meshed the way an artist/writer team should. John Byrne put a lot of his own input into the stories and would become annoyed when something he drew one way would be scripted by Claremont another way later, which led to occasional creative conflicts. It was over this sort of frustration, and a refusal by Claremont to give Byrne equal say in the direction the stories would go, that he finally left the title to be writer/artist on the **Fantastic Four**. Byrne recently took a sort of Canadian version of the X-Men which he'd created in the title, called Alpha Flight, and gave it it's own magazine, which fans have been responding to enthusiastically.

One can only wonder where the book would have gone had Byrne stayed with it as two of his last issues, **X-Men #141-142** contained one of the best stories to ever appear in the title. "Days of Future Past" was a time travel tale involving dual, related stories. The Kitty Pryde of years in the future is able to briefly have her mind sent into her past self in order to warn the X-Men so that they can prevent the murder of a presidential candidate which would ultimately mean the end of the world in the future. While the present day X-Men perform their mission, we see the future from which Kitty Pryde briefly escaped, a future where Sentinels hunt down and capture or destroy any superpowered being, whether mutant or no. One by one we see the murder of all the X-Men we know, those of Storm and Wolverine being the most shocking.

There are many standout stories in the Claremont/Byrne series. Issues #111-116 are especially good, as are the Dark Phoenix stories. This series, which involved Jean Grey's powers warping her and twisting her into the insane Dark Phoenix, climaxed in

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#137 when she committed suicide in order to prevent Dark Phoenix from ever rising again. But that's not how Chris Claremont planned it. He'd originally written #137 so that Jean Grey was stripped of her powers forever because Dark Phoenix had destroyed a planet of four billion people. But when editor Jim Shooter saw the pencilled pages he rejected them because even though Claremont's editor, Jim Salicrup, had approved the story, Shooter hadn't seen it until it was drawn. Shooter felt that Phoenix was getting off too lightly and should be imprisoned under eternal torture for her acts, even though she was insane at the time she committed them. Rather than do that, Claremont just had her kill herself with an ancient Kree weapon left on the moon in the blue area. Even this was sabotaged by his disputes with John Byrne because he wanted it to be a weapon in the house of The Watcher which exists in that blue area, but when Byrne drew those pages he didn't like that idea and changed it. By this time, Claremont was so depressed over the entire situation that he just let it go, but Byrne's actions could only have hastened the breakup of the team.

Ever since she died, fans have been wondering if Phoenix will return, and although Shooter claims she's dead, Claremont has been dropping hints in recent stories about a new Phoenix storyline to come. Whether this had anything to do with Paul Smith's departure (over creative differences, just as Byrne's was) is unknown.

Paul Smith's vivid and powerful style has brought just as much verve to the title as Byrne's very different style did. Whereas inker Bob Wiacek isn't suited to some pencillers, his style meshes perfectly with Smith, just as Austin's brought out every stroke of power in Byrne's pencils. The real test is that reproduction of the Smith/Wiacek art is crisp and clear with no haziness to the art at all, whereas Byrne's inking of his own pencils is consistently plagued by muddy translation to the comic book page.

Under Claremont, the X-Men has become a much more brutal and realistic title over the past few years. Even the word grim might apply. While in interviews he has talked about pulling back in the other direction, in #170 he pulled a shocker when Storm, who has sworn never to kill, stabs a vicious opponent through the heart. Although she no doubt knew that a mutant was present who would save the woman, the undisguised brutality of the act and the lack of recriminations remains to haunt the reader.

One of the weirdest stories Claremont ever did took place under the Claremont/Smith team when the X-Men encountered bizarre alien beings which Wolverine dubbed "the sleazoids." As with #143, Claremont was once more indulging in an homage to all that H.R. Giger did for the film **Alien** in that Giger's bizarre monster has become the monster cliche of the Eighties, and nowhere is it more present than in Claremont's X-Men. On the plus side, the story these creatures populated was filled with other sorts of wonders which didn't rely on the Sleazoids to strengthen their invention. The most talked about moment in **X-Men #165** is when Kitty Pryde, who loves Peter Rasputin, offers her 14 year old self to him in an understated scene whose intentions are all too clear, but Peter does have a nice way of saying, "This is not the proper time or place."

Although conceived with the foreign market in mind, the new X-Men have become a sensation everywhere.

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Guest appearances in other books are guaranteed to boost sales. Wolverine, the controversial and violent member of the team (whose personality seems to be rubbing off on Storm lately), was a hit in his own four issue mini-series drawn by Frank Miller. Old issues are being reprinted. A lukewarm companion title, **The New Mutants**, was launched last year (dubbed "the X-babies" by the X-Men's own Kitty Pryde), and Brent Anderson drew a popular X-Men graphic novel published book size on slick paper. Mary Jo Duffy even wrote an X-Men prose story for Marvel Novel Series #9: **The Marvel Superheroes**, published in 1979.

Whereas in the Sixties **The X-Men** seemed the ugly duckling of the Marvel line, in the Seventies and Eighties they've matured into the consistently enduring hit of the Marvel Age.

NEXT ISSUE: CHANGING THE LINEUP

SUPERMAN

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While Superman didn't cause comic books to come into being, he did change the face of them forever.

Just as with many early comic strip heroes, the inspiration for Superman came from the pulp magazines of the early Thirties. Young Jerry Siegel was an avid reader of science fiction. With a touch of Doc Savage and an especially large dose of Philip Wylie's 1930 novel *Gladiator*, it didn't take much for the seventeen year old Jerry Siegel to dream up his own version of a fantastic hero.

Hugo Danner, the hero of Wylie's novel, possessed most of the attributes of the early Superman, including an ability to leap which was much like flying. Possessing super-hard skin, Danner can be hurt by an exploding artillery shell, but ordinary bullets just bounce off.

Conceived in 1933, Jerry quickly shared his idea with his friend Joe Shuster and together they began developing the concept. At first their Superman wore civilian clothes, but gradually they designed the basic costume with which he would become identified and which would be only slightly modified throughout his comic book life.

Superman would become a hit with readers. But he was not a hit with the editors whom Siegel and Shuster pitched the strip to for five full years. All of the newspaper strip syndicates rejected it as unsuitable and not at all what they were looking for. It was a quirk of fate that brought it into comic books.

The strip idea was sitting on the desk of M.C. Gaines (the father of William Gaines of E.C. and Mad comics fame) at the McClure Syndicate. It was about to be rejected yet another time when Gaines received a call from Harry Donenfeld who had recently taken over the interests of Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson and was trying to assemble material for a new book. Comic books up to this time had largely consisted of vastly shrunken-down reprints of newspaper strips. This one would be all new material. While such a thing had been tried before, they had always pretty much just been imitations of existing newspaper strips. In fact, Siegel and Shuster had worked for Donenfeld previously, drawing "Federal Men", "Slam Bradley", "Spy", "Henri Duval", "Dr. Occult" and "Radio Squad". They were grateful that the story would see print, even if it wouldn't be on as grand a scale as a nationally syndicated newspaper strip.

Action 1 was a success but it wasn't until the fourth issue that the publishers realized that it was Superman that was making it one. Investigations had indicated that this might be so. When they featured the red, yellow and blue garbed avenger on the cover of the fourth issue, it sold out. He was the first costumed super-hero and his success inspired countless others.

Thus the legend was born. Working from their small office in Cleveland, Siegel and Shuster hired other artists to ghost both the comic book and the syndicated newspaper strip. What there had been no interest in for six years had suddenly become one of the hottest properties around. The artists hired to assist Shuster, who was even then developing eye problems, were Paul Cassidy, Loe Nowack and John Sikela (who would later draw all of the stories in the first issue of *Superboy* in 1949). But the artist who had the most impact on the strip also came into it at this time. His name is Wayne Boring.

While fans associate Wayne Boring with the Superman stories of the Fifties, Boring was also very much in evidence in the Forties. In fact it was his slick and highly polished style which brought a sleek and graceful look to the strip replacing the old, Thirties style of drawing employed by Joe Shuster. Much of the art done in the early Forties which was attributed to Joe Shuster was actually ghosted by Wayne Boring. The look of Superman which continued through the late Sixties, Seventies and into today was established by Wayne Boring over forty years ago. D.C. has been so conscious of this slick look that when Jack Kirby drew several issues of *Jimmy Olsen* in the early Seventies, all of the appearances of Superman were redrawn by Curt Swan.

Curt Swan joined D.C.'s staff in 1945, drawing a Boy Commandoes story as his try-out assignment. He did so well that he remained with the strip for three or four more years. He then drew a few Superboy stories but his first Superman story didn't come until 1955 when he worked on the Superman 3-D comic (which was reprinted in 1966). Thereafter he occasionally drew Superman stories doing more and more as the Sixties progressed.

In the Forties Superman underwent all of the real changes that the character would ever go through. His chest emblem's shape was established by around issue 9 of *Superman* magazine. His leaping became flying when the Fleischer animation studio explained that leaping did not look right on the screen and that they'd have to change the character so that his ability was more graceful. Interestingly, most of the character changes came from outside sources like this. Jimmy Olsen was introduced on the radio show so that Superman would have someone to talk to and thus advance the story. Jimmy was introduced in the comic books in *Superman 13*. Supposedly the radio show also introduced green kryptonite so that Superman would have a weakness as he was quickly becoming more super the more popular he became.

But while Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster made Superman an alien from another world because of their intense interest in science fiction, it took another man to nail that down and explain just why coming from another world meant that Superman was unique on Earth.

In the Fleischer Brothers cartoons they stated that Superman came from a "world of super-men." But if that was the case, why didn't the others escape from Krypton using their super powers? It was Mort Weisinger, former editor of the science fiction pulp magazine *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, who answered the questions that he knew readers must be asking about what makes Superman super.

"So he came from another planet and there's a difference in gravity? Why should he be able to fly? Why should he have X-Ray vision? It's contrary to science and reason," Weisinger stated. "I originated the concept that in a world circling a yellow sun his powers are multiplied, and that yellow sun gave him these abilities. These are the things the originators of Superman didn't figure out; they gave us this fabulous character without explaining why all his fabulous attributes existed."

It was Mort Weisinger and his writers who introduced such now familiar features as The Phantom Zone, where criminals were exiled on Krypton since the society did not believe in capital punishment. He also introduced the bottled city of Kandor which had been shrunken down by the super criminal Brainiac before Krypton exploded. It was Weisinger and his writers, people such as science fiction great Edmond Hamilton, who began revealing that Superman was not the sole survivor of Krypton. Besides the Phantom Zone criminals who would periodically escape to wreck havoc, *Action 252* introduced Superman's cousin, who would come to be known as Supergirl.

It was explained that an asteroid-sized chunk of Krypton was hurled into space by the explosion. The people were able to survive by putting down thick lead shielding against the Kryptonite rays emitted by the piece of their world which had now developed radioactive properties deadly to them. For years this worked. Superman's cousin was born and grew to adolescence, but then a meteor shower destroyed the lead shielding and the girl's parents put her in a small rocket and propelled her towards the Earth. There she was found by Supman. For no particularly good reason other than to have things handled differently, Superman asked his cousin to keep her existence a secret. So she lived at an orphanage and performed supermissions secretly until she was officially revealed to the world in *Action 285*, nearly three years later.

It was under Weisinger that the "imaginary story" was introduced, which is D.C.'s version of what Marvel does in *What If?*. The only differenceis that Marvel says that theirs is an *alternate reality* while D.C. labels theirs as outright imaginary tales. No real difference at all.

The most famous of all the Superman imaginary stories is "The Death Of Superman" in *Superman 149* (November, 1961) in which Lex Luthor finds a cure for cancer, pretends to go straight and then traps Superman once and for all, killing him with a kryptonite ray. This occurred during the period that Suprgirl was still working as Superman's "secret weapon". In this story she makes her dramatic appearance to the world by capturing Luthor and taking him to Kandor where he is sentenced to the Phantom Zone.

Some fans prefer "The Amazing Story of Superman Red

"BACK IN THE MIDDLE OF THE 20TH CENTURY, AN INFANT NAMED KAL-EL WAS ROCKETED TO EARTH JUST AS HIS NATIVE PLANET, KRYPTON, EXPLODED!"
I'LL NEVER FORGET THAT GHASTLY DAY!

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and Superman Blue" in *Superman 162*, but this is more of a wish-fulfillment story. Superman is divided into two Supermen, one with a predominantly red costume and the other with a predominantly blue one. They proceed to marry the women of their choice (one marries Lana Lang, the other Lois Lane) and solve all of the ills of the world, including putting an anti-evil ray into orbit so that all criminals reform. As dark as "The Death of Superman" is, that's how light is "The Amazing Story Of Superman Red and Superman Blue".

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But probably the all-time favorite Supman legend is "Superman's Return to Krypton" in *Superman 141* which features some of Wayne Boring's finest art in the series. What's more surprising is that it is *not* an imaginary story! While attempting to pursue a strange alien creature, Superman flies too fast and crashes through the time barrier into the past where he finds himself within sight of Krypton and its red sun. Knowing that he'll lose his powers he quickly lands on the planet. While there he falls in love with an actress he meets while working as an extra on a movie, and even meets his parents — at their wedding. Another quirk enables him to escape Krypton's fate but the ending is rather pat compared to the rest of the story.

Inexplicably, Wayne Boring was fired by Weisinger in 1966. After doing a little work for Marvel comics he went into commercial art and today works as a security guard — but he may yet do a new Superman story or two.

Another Weisinger innovation was red kryptonite, a form which was not deadly but which could have peculiar effects on any former Kryptonian. Its changes varied from splitting them into two people, temporarily stealing their powers, giving them amnesia, making them fat, tiny or insane. The effects are temporary and the same piece of red K cannot affect the same person twice.

In the early Seventies, all of the kryptonite on Earth was neutralized so that writers had to seek elsewhere for possibilities. Superman was updated by having him become a TV journalist instead of a newspaper reporter. But other than continuing subplots (such as Vandal Savage coming from Earth II to our world where he's a legitimate businessman despite what Superman knows of his nefarious activities on our parallel world), the stories are fairly average. The only really exciting things in the book lately have been some stories by Marv Wolfman illustrated by Gil Kane for *Action Comics*. Kane brings a pleasant early Sixties look to the strip and Wolfman's stories have tended to be inventive the way the best of the old Superman stories were.

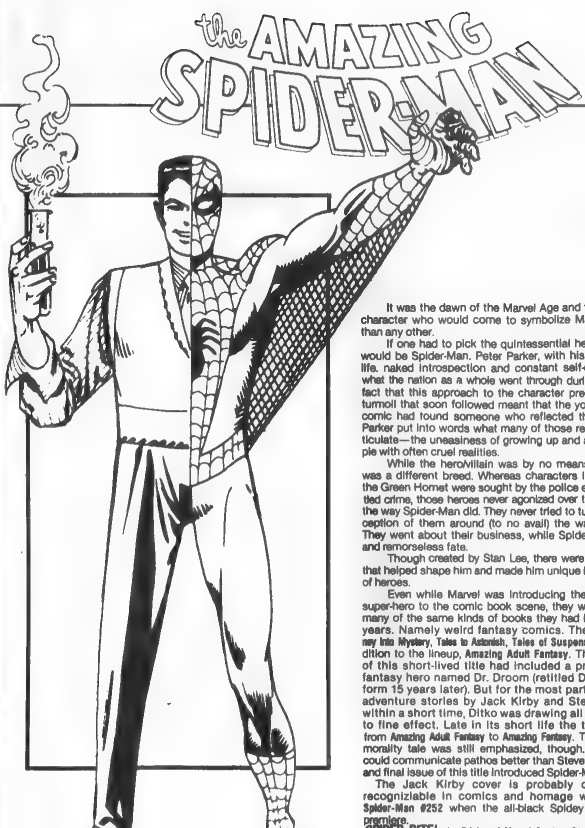
Oddly enough, the best Superman story done in years was not in the comics but in the first Superman motion picture, directed by Richard Donner. There was clearly a lot of respect for the material and the introduction, showing a boy reading an old Superman story which fades into the globe on the Daily Planet building, got everything off to a glorious start. Richard Donner infused the first film with a heart that was all but missing in the second and stabbed through and through in the third. The third film is notable only because the artificial kryptonite is apparently red K as its effects, although more prolonged, are quite similar.

After the first Superman film came out in 1978, people started wondering why the comic book isn't written with as much force and dynamism. The first film *seemed* real whereas the comic book reads like a comic book, even on its best days.

In *The History of Comics*, Jim Steranko best recognized the position that Superman was in, then and now, when he said, "If he has weakened, we must remember that like the legendary Atlas, Superman bears the weight of the comic world upon his shoulders. If he has been momentarily eclipsed by the scintilla of stylistic trends, we must understand his position is one of stability, not of change. And if he has grown weary we must embrace him for the ten thousand and one battles he has fought, outselling all his imitators put together, for his is a timeless triumph and from his life stream all hero strips flow.

"He is a superman among supermen."

NEXT ISSUE: THE BYRNE REVOLUTION



It was the dawn of the Marvel Age and the birth of the one character who would come to symbolize Marvel Comics more than any other.

If one had to pick the quintessential hero of the Sixties, it would be Spider-Man. Peter Parker, with his turbulent personal life, naked introspection and constant self-doubts, epitomized what the nation as a whole went through during the decade. The fact that this approach to the character predated the youthful turmoil that soon followed meant that the young readers of the comic had found someone who reflected their own anxieties. Parker put into words what many of those readers could not articulate—the uneasiness of growing up and attempting to grapple with often cruel realities.

While the hero/villain was by no means new, Spider-Man was a different breed. Whereas characters like the Spider and the Green Hornet were sought by the police even while they battled crime, those heroes never agonized over that cruel dichotomy the way Spider-Man did. They never tried to turn the public's perception of them around (to no avail) the way Spider-Man did. They went about their business, while Spidey cursed an unfair and remorseless fate.

Though created by Stan Lee, there were several other hands that helped shape him and made him unique in the Marvel stable of heroes.

Even while Marvel was introducing their unique brand of super-hero to the comic book scene, they were still publishing many of the same kinds of books they had been producing for years. Namely weird fantasy comics. These included **Journey Into Mystery, Tales to Astonish, Tales of Suspense** and a recent addition to the lineup, **Amazing Adult Fantasy**. The earliest issues of this short-lived title had included a pre-Doctor Strange fantasy hero named Dr. Droom (retitled Dr. Druid in reprint form 15 years later). But for the most part it featured weird adventure stories by Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko. In fact, within a short time, Ditko was drawing all of the stories and to fine effect. Late in its short life the title was changed from **Amazing Adult Fantasy** to **Amazing Fantasy**. The **Twilight Zone**-style morality tale was still emphasized, though. But then, no one could communicate pathos better than Steve Ditko. The fifteenth and final issue of this title introduced Spider-Man.

The Jack Kirby cover is probably one of the most recognizable in comics and homage was paid to it on **Spider-Man #252** when the all-black Spidey uniform made its premiere.

SPIDER BITE! In **Origins of Marvel Comics**, Stan Lee recalled the creation of this soon to be star of the Marvel universe. "For quite a while I'd been toying with the idea of doing a strip that would violate all the conventions—break all the rules. A strip that would actually feature a teenager as the star, instead of making him an (ugh!) adult hero's sidekick. A strip in which the main character

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would lose out as often as he'd win—in fact more often. A strip in which nothing would progress according to formula—the situations, the cast of characters and their relationship to each other would all be unusual and unexpected. Yep, I knew what I wanted all right, but where would I ever get a chance to try it? Where—except in a magazine that we were planning to kill anyway?

"What about the name?" Lee continued. "Why Spider-Man? Simple. In the long-dead, practically Paleolithic era when I had been on the verge of approaching teenagerhood, one of my favorite pulp magazine heroes was a stalwart named The Spider. He wore a slouch hat and a finger ring with the image of an arachnid—a ring which, when he punched a foe fearlessly in the face, would leave its mark—an impression of a spider. It was The Spider's calling card, and it sent goose pimples up and down my ten-year old spine. More than that, I can still remember how the magazine's subtitle grabbed me. It was called **The Spider** but after his name were the never-to-be-forgotten words: **Master of Men.** Just to play with that for a moment—roll it around on your tongue, savor the fateful, fascinating flavor—**The Spider, Master of Men.** My mind was made up, the stage was set, the cards had been dealt. I was no more than a puppet in the shadow show of destiny."

Lee discussed the idea with his publisher, Martin Goodman, but Goodman pointed out that most people didn't like spiders. Lee explained how he'd loved the old **Spider** pulp magazine in his youth and hoped to infuse the strip with the same sort of reader enthusiasm.

Lee approached Jack Kirby to do the strip. That was only proper as Kirby was a natural for super-heroes and had already been carrying off the Fantastic Four and The Hulk quite successful'y. Lee explained that he wanted Spider-Man to look less heroic, like a normal person wearing a costume, not the handsome or graceful square-jawed hero he was accustomed to doing. Kirby took the assignment, but Lee was unhappy with the initial pages. Kirby just could not deglamorize the concept enough. So while Kirby had designed the costume (and thus the cover as well), the strip was then turned over to Steve Ditko.

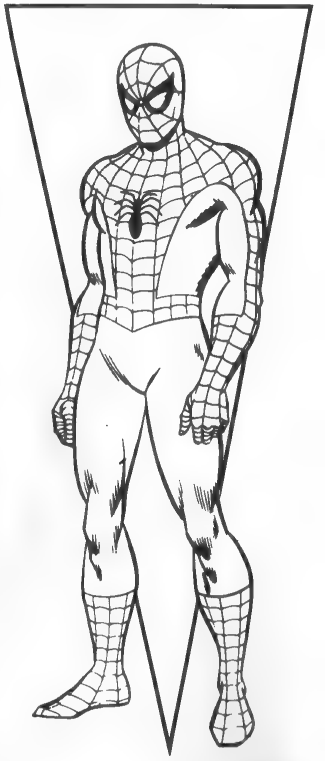
Ditko had not exactly been known for superheroes up to this point. In fact from his first work in comics in 1955 up to doing Spider-Man in 1963, he had almost exclusively drawn mystery and science fiction stories. Superheroes are something else again. But then Lee didn't want this to be a standard hero by any stretch of the imagination. What Ditko gave him was pure magic.

"After Spidey's premiere appearance in **Amazing Fantasy #15,**" Lee recalled, "the book was dropped and we all forgot about it. I'd gotten the Spider-Man character out of my system and could now go back to our other superstars."

THE AMAZING SPIDER-STAR But then the sales reports came in. The book had been a best seller, and Spider-Man had to be the reason. Lee met with Martin Goodman and the character was given a rebirth in its own magazine.

The things which Ditko did with this title alienated some people then, and apparently a lot of newer fans now (the Ditko reprints of those classics are not met with enthusiasm by the modern young collector. This isn't the Spider-Man they know. It's too different. It looks "old." The art is ugly. Why isn't it by John Byrne? Most of the newer fans probably didn't even realize that **Spider-Man Annual #1**8 is in pacing and layout identical in approach to a Ditko Spider-Man. Even the art is a clear homage to Ditko, albeit with the slick sheen the Eighties fan comes to expect in a Marvel comic.)

What Ditko did was draw Spider-Man so that it wasn't larger than life. In fact it often seemed uncomfortably close to life. New



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York was never gloomier or grittier than when drawn by Ditko, but for anyone who knows New York, that's what its like. These characters lived in a real world. Each panel didn't glitter with some slick new look such as Kirby gave his books. But then this was only right. The Fantastic Four were wealthy. Peter Parker lived with his aunt.

In the origin story and in the early issues of the magazine, Peter Parker was an ordinary looking high school student. He was a bookworm with geeky glasses. But by page three he'd been bitten by a radioactive spider and in no time flat he'd made his own costume and even invented his web-shooters and web fluid. In 11 pages he'd achieved fame but lost his Uncle Ben to a hood he could have stopped if his sudden fame hadn't made him too arrogant to want to bother. Thus was born a hero driven by a guilt he could never expunge. His uncle would not have died had he acted when he had the chance. (The element came full circle in **Spider Man #200** when the burglar finally died, frightened into a heart attack by his fear of Spider-man).

While there are many true-blue fans who go back and reread the first 38 issues and the first two annuals with great fondness, I daresay that most of today's readers of **Spider-Man** find little to relate to in those Steve Ditko issues. This is because Ditko was a different kind of artist to have picked for this book,

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and he delivered something unique. Look at **Spider-Man** today. It is virtually indistinguishable from the rest of the comics on the newsstand. This is because Spider-Man is successful and one doesn't mess with success. So when Steve Ditko left the book he was replaced by John Romita, who is not exactly master originality in his approach to art. He is a slick, competent but unexciting craftsman and the book has been drawn by many of those over the intervening years. But that's not what established Spider-Man.

Steve Ditko's art (as well as his plotting and a lot of uncredited writing) drew us into the world of Peter Parker and the rest. Its earthy, straightforward approach, along with the stories, made it a strip much easier to identify with than any other being done. Other comics may have been flashier and prettier, but Spider-Man was more real.

OVER THE EDGE With the first issue of his regular magazine, Marvel made Spider-Man something apart. Lee succeeded in making Spider-Man someone who tried to do his best, only to see things turn out wrong. J. Jonah Jameson immediately branded Spider-Man a menace when all he was doing was appearing as a performer, thus ruining his income. When Spidey saved Jonah's astronaut son, he was branded a criminal who had staged the whole incident. When he fought the Chameleon, who had committed a crime disguised as Spider-Man, he found himself having to escape the police when they believed him to be the Chameleon as well. At the conclusion of the story we see a young man who had failed and who was at the bottom of the heap even though he had powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men. He'd even spent the whole issue trying to earn money to help his aunt pay their rent, but without a single success. We were left wondering what kind of a hero Spider-man was going to be if he was hounded, branded a menace and driven by desperation. Parker had already imagined the possibilities open to him should he turn his powers to crime. When had a hero even entertained the possibility before? The future was wide open.

While today there have been hundreds of Spider-Man stories exploring and re-exploring all of the plots possible with the character, at the time there were no limits. We couldn't read a story and say, "Well, this is only the third time he's done this. Ho hum. . ." Each issue had an atmosphere of exploration and discovery. Would Spider-Man be pushed over the edge? Wouldn't we in the same circumstances? While readers may have imagined themselves as the Human Torch or The Flash, Peter Parker's life was uncomfortably close to home; his worries uncomfortably close to ours.

Even then some fans found Ditko's art crude because when had they ever seen a "realistic" super-hero strip? The characters weren't all handsome and the locales weren't all sleek like a Carmine Infantino city. It looked like the places we lived and the people we knew. The comic was definitely like nothing we'd ever seen before.

With the second issue the continuing adventures started being brought more into focus. Despite the brooding, threatening ending of the first issue, here he came up with his job idea—selling photos to Jameson. He sold enough photos of the Vulture to pay his aunt's rent for a year with money left over.

As with the first issue, this one featured two stories. The first introduced the Vulture in a clever and interesting story. The only drawback is that, like Mr. Fantastic, Peter Parker cobbled together an electronic doohicky to defeat the garishly garbed felon while knowing nothing about how the Vulture flew. I guess with some people a deduction can go a long way.

The second story in the issue was a cross between a super-hero story and something you'd expect to find in the old **Tales to Astonish**. Spidey stumbles onto a nest of aliens (and I don't mean the Latino variety) and foils their invasion plans. Even the conclusion is in keeping with the old bizarre twist at the end bit. And drawn by Ditko it was even more effective.

Issue three introduced probably the most popular Marvel villain next to Dr. Doom—Doctor Octopus! This first booklength story of Spidey has some of the most dynamic graphics Ditko has ever done. Much is done with contrasting lights and shadows whenever Dr. Octopus is seen. Even in black and white this story is extremely effective and is one of those books which demonstrates the power of comic book storytelling when handled by a master. Another strength of this and other early issues is the use of captions only when necessary. Instead of cluttering up a page with overly wordy captions such as most comics do today, this issue shows the strength of using only the amount of words necessary. This lack of captions is all important to the strength and pacing of the story.

AMAZING ADVENTURE These early issues showed Marvel Comics at the height of its creative form. In issue #4 he met the Sandman, an oddball villain if there ever was one and, like the Hulk, the product of a man getting caught in an atomic blast.

In issue #5 he faced Dr. Doom, in a story which was a sequel to **Fantastic Four** no. 17. The FF even make an appearence at the end. **Spider-Man** went monthly with no. 4 and for a few issues Ditko's art wasn't as slick as it was on the first three issues, as though he couldn't spend as much time inking it. But it was still fine work.

One reason the newer, younger fans of Spider-Man can't warm up to these classic issues is that, other than Aunt May and Jameson, the supporting cast is almost entirely different. Peter is in High School and Flash Thompson, the ultimate jock, is the bane of his existence. Plus Peter is always having misunderstandings with Liz, a girl he likes, as well as pining away for Betty Brant, an "older Woman" and Jameson's secretary. All of these characters and relationships were resolved over 15 years ago in the comic book, before most of the current readers were even born. So while some new fans can't warm up to Steve Ditko's art, the stories are probably just as much the reason that **Marvel Tales** actually sells better when it reprints more recent issues of **Spider-Man**.

While most of Spidey's adventures take place in New York (which must have been declared a disaster area years ago because of all the super-villians who lay waste to sections of it periodically), Issue #6 sent Peter Parker on assignment to Florida where he could investigate the mysterious being called The Lizard. This is the type of story Marvel did quite well back then, wherein the villain is not responsible for his actions. Curt Conners, in trying to grow a new arm, instead becomes a human lizard when his formula derived from reptile enzymes backfires on him. This time instead of a gizmo, Spidey whips up a concoction which returns Connors to normal. The Lizard has returned over the years but never as polgnantly portrayed as he was in the original appearance when we saw him slowly losing his humanity and reacting to his family. The story is somewhat reminescent of the old film **The Alligator People**.

Number seven featured the return of the Vulture, but it was issue eight where obvious changes began. Peter Parker had gradually started looking less geeky and more handsome over the months. On page two of the story when his glasses are broken, he's clearly not the same ugly guy we saw in the origin story. I guess getting bitten by radioactive spiders clears up vision problems as well as your complexion.

The second story in #8 (the last time they'd do this during the Ditko years), showed us what Spider-Man might have looked like had Kirby been the book's artist. It's just a plotless little exercise in which Spidey meets the FF again. Although inked by

Ditko, Spidey's eyepieces on the mask are very small, and while the art is very good, Spider-Man just doesn't move with the same grace that Ditko infused him with. Also, Kirby's people tend to all look very similar (and very handsome) whereas Ditko can really draw some unusual and very dissimilar looking characters when he puts his mind to it. And he really put his mind to it in his Spider-Man days. You couldn't mistake one person for another in Ditko's Spider-Man!

One oddity about these early issues is that the color of Spider-Man's costume kept changing. One issue it would be blue and red and the next it would be purple and red. I always found the purple, and a deep purple it was, a more interesting combination with the red, webbed portion.

CLASSIC WEB RIDES The Ditko years introduced characters and stories which would shape the future of the title. Issue fourteen introduced The Green Goblin without giving us an origin or secret identity. This did not come for a long time. There wasn't even a good suspect. Issues 17-19 were the first time, and the most effective, that Peter Parker quit being Spider-Man. What made this work so well is that the uncreditted writing by Ditko captured a much truer sense of despair and alienation than Lee did by himself. The turbulant feelings expressed by the characters seemed much truer to life than the same things attempted by Lee alone beginning in **Spider-Man** 39.

By **Spider-Man** 37, Ditko's art had tightened up and smoothed out again so that the inking looked much more slick than it had back around issue 7. This is the issue which introduced the Scorpion, who made an interesting appearance in **Spider-Man Annual 10.** The Scorpion marked the first, but not the last, time Jameson paid to have something created that would defeat Spider-Man. In doing so, he unleashed a worse menace. In issue 25 he paid to have a robot programmed to chase and capture the hero, and it worked. Issue 28, which sports one of the most effective covers in the series, introduced the Molten Man and featured Peter Parker's high school graduation. Real changes took place in the series after this including the fading away of personalities who had been major supporting characters up to that time, such as Liz Allen and Flash Thompson. High school was over, and as is the case with such things, people tended to go their separate ways.

In issues 31-33 we saw what is probably the best continued story the series has presented. While Aunt May getting sick was already a recurring motif by this time, it was handled most skillfuly in this story, especially when Spider-Man has to take on Dr. Octopus and his gang to get the serum that will save her. These three issues contain the quintessential elements which made Spider-Man and Marvel what it was in the Sixties.

The first two Spider-Man annuals (in 1964 & 1965) featured stories which really pulled out all the stops. In the first annual Spider-Man took on virtually all of his major foes up to that time in a real feast of Ditko excellence. It also introduced the bizarre subplot of Aunt May liking Dr. Octopus and thinking him a wonderful gentleman. The second annual guest-starred Ditko's other masterfully wrought character, Dr. Strange. For sheer excellence, these specials would not be approached for many years to come.

The last Ditko **Spider-Man** was number 38. His final issues were relatively average fare, as though Ditko was just marking time.

A NEW ERA In number 39 the Green Goblin returned, captured Spider-Man and unmasked him in a story so good we were not supposed to notice that Ditko was gone. Instead, it only made us wonder how special it would have looked had Ditko drawn it instead of John Romita. Romita did a credible job on Spider-Man for a few issues, but then the book started looking rushed and not as carefully thought out. Plus the stories lacked the depth they'd had under Ditko, which was the real revelation of how much he had contributed to the series.

It seems that nearly everyone has drawn Spider-Man over the years since Ditko left. One of the best jobs was by Gil Kane, who brings a special atmosphere to any book he draws.

Marvel has always tried to celebrate special issues with special stories. In number 50, Spider-Man quit and hung up his costume again. In issue 100 they came up with the especially silly notion of having him grow four extra arms (this grotesque idea, mercifully, only lasted three issues).

Spider-Man, of course, has become a virtual industry unto himself, what with the magazines **Amazing Spider-Man, Marvel Tales, Web of Spider-Man** and **Peter Parker, The Spectacular Spider-Man** appearing every month. He is to Marvel what Superman is to DC. He's everywhere. The overexposure, while bringing more opportunities for good writers to depict the character, has diluted his quality.

Some recent annuals have been good, though. Annual 13 featuring Dr. Octopus, was written by Marv Wolfman and drawn by John Byrne and Terry Austin. Annuals 14 & 15 were both by Frank Miller. While Byrne drew Spider-Man his own way (which was fine), Miller brought a touch of Ditko to his layouts and designs. Annual 14 guest-starred Dr. Strange. Annual 18 went even further in capturing the Ditko flair, even to often using the nine-panel pages which many of Ditko's **Spider-Man** employed. The art is a cross between Ditko-style touches and the slick look of most modern comics.

Nostalgia has been a popular springboard for Spider-Man stories. In **What If? 46,** ("What If Spider-Man's Uncle Ben had Lived?"), the art drips with atmospheric Ditko *homages*. It captures the feel of of the Sixties Spider-Man quite well for that, written by Peter Gillis and drawn by Ron Frenz and Sam DeLaRosa. Another one, much shorter but just as good from every angle, appeared in **Spider-Man 248**, "The Kid Who Collects Spider-Man!" Drawn by Frenz and Terry Austin and written by Roger Stern, it's a touching and blatantly manipulative story. Yet, after reading it, you wish it was longer (and that it really happened).

Frank Miller did his usual fine job on Spider-Man once again in **Marvel Team-Up 100**, which co-starred the Fantastic Four. The story by Miller and Chris Claremont is unusually good and the art is wonderful, especially the splash page which instantly hurls us older fans back 20 years because it looks like pure Ditko. No one has left a mark on the character the way Ditko has.

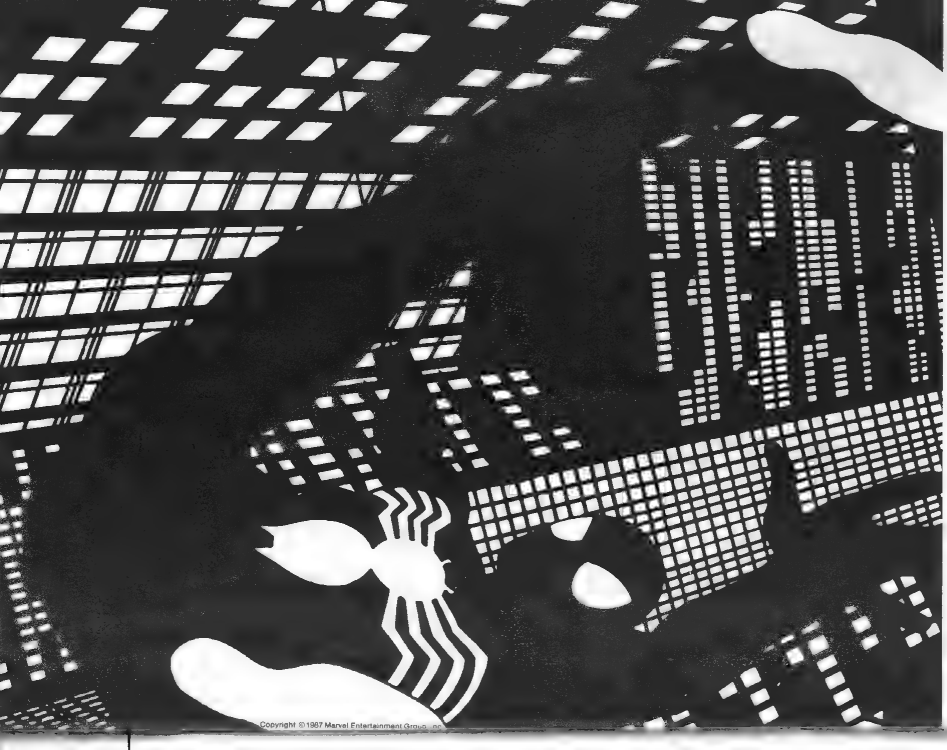
The biggest news involving Spider-Man recently was of course his new, all-black costume which premiered in number 252 (although its origin wasn't seen until six months later in **Secret Wars 8**).

Spider-Man is so ubiquitous that it's sometimes difficult to decide what to make of him. For instance, the Spider-Man newspaper strip has been running successfully for several years now, but the stories seem set in a completely different universe from the books. When the Kingpin's wife was crippled in the strip and the rotund criminal blamed himself, this aspect never appeared anywhere in Marvel Comics. In fact, a totally different use of the Kingpin's (perfectly healthy) wife was made by Frank Miller in **Daredevil**. The two stories never matched up.

And of course there was a Spider-Man live-action tv show a few years back, as well as two different cartoon shows. He gets around. But it seems that, for all of the different versions of him that there are, there are fans who prefer that one over the others. The best stories seem to happen when the current creative talent, who in most cases were little kids 20 years ago, reach back to the formative period of the comic when raw talent and fresh ideas emerged in each and every issue. That's when the stories catch fire and Spider-Man lives up to his legend.

NEXT ISSUE: WEDDING BELLS

INTERMISSION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It was the dawn of the age of comic books. The superhero was in its youth and so were their creators. New ideas fed more new ideas and at DC, where Superman had filled a void most people hadn't even realized existed, another legend was in the offing. While totally different than the Man of Steel, he and the Caped Crusader would yet become inextricably linked as the years passed. Moreso than any other characters the company would create.

In 1939, artist Bob Kane was barely in his twenties when he created The Bat-Man (as he was originally called). He'd begun professional cartooning in 1938 working for the famous Eisner/Iger shop producing Spark Stevens for **Wonder Comics**, Peter Pupp for **Jumbo Comics**, "Side Streets of New York" and "Van Bragger" for **Circus Comics** and humor strips for DC including "Jest A Second," "Gingersnap," "Gumshoe" and "Professor Doolittle."

But with the success of Superman, DC wanted to forge ahead with as many costumed adventurer strips as they could come up with. Bob Kane was asked to come up with one by editor Whitney Ellsworth.

Bob Kane's collaborator at the time was writer Bill Finger. Kane had already worked with Finger on the adventure strips "Rusty And His Pals" for **Adventure Comics** and one about a big game hunter, "Clip Carson."

Kane called up Finger and described his idea for a character called Batman. Finger went over to see the drawings which showed a figure who looked somewhat like Superman. The costume featured tights, boots and a small domino mask. There were no gloves or gauntlets. Instead of a cape there were two stiff wings looking like bat wings. With Finger suggesting alterations, the mask became a cowl with long ears to make the costume more bat-like.

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Finger wanted the character to look more mysterious, like The Shadow or The Phantom. A cape replaced the wings and gloves were added.

As the writer, Finger envisioned The Batman as being a combination of The Shadow, Doc Savage, Douglas Fairbanks and Sherlock Holmes.

Bob Kane was heavily influenced by such newspaper strips as Flash Gordon and Dick Tracy, but the early strips showed a marked influence frm Milton Caniff's Terry And The Pirates as well as Chester Gould's Dick Tracy. The Gould influence was especially pronounced in the rendering of the underworld characters.

The first strip, which appeared in the monthly **Detective Comics** (May, 1939), bore the logo: The "Bat-Man," a mysterious and adventurous figure, fighting for righteousness and apprehending the wrong doer, in his lone battle against the evil forces of society... his identity remains unknown.

The hyphen in the name didn't last long. In this six page story, The Batman has already been battling criminals and his appearance has Commissioner Gordon puzzled. Bruce Wayne, wealthy socialite and friend of Gordon, appears in the first panel, but he's treated as just a background character until the closing panels reveal him to be "The Bat-Man!"

In a somewhat crude and yet expressive style, the Bob Kane art captures well the Thirties atmosphere which was then contemporary to the tale. Backgrounds are sparse and often nonexistent, emphasizing the swift pace of the story and the focus of the action. When The Bat-Man subdues a murderer in the climax of the story, the man falls backwards into an acid tank. To this The Bat-Man coldly observes, "A fitting end for his kind."

These were the days when the vigilante spirit was popular, even more popular than it is now.

Detective #27 was reprinted as a tabloid-size exact facsimile in 1974 although the original **Detective** #27 was a normal size for the Golden Age (which were larger than present day comic books). Some misguided souls do come across one of these (minus the

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YEAH ... DID IT! I WANTED TO RUIN HIS HANDSOME FACE SO SALLY WOULDN'T LIKE HIM ANYMORE! NOW SHE'LL NEVER MARRY HIM!
YOU FOOL! BECAUSE OF YOUR JEALOUS LOVE, YOU'VE DONE A TERRIBLE THING!
ONLY LATER, WHEN THE DOCTOR FINALLY UNWINDS THE BANDAGE S ...
"WHEN MY FACE IS SCARRED IN ONE SIDE--MY LIFE THE TWO-FACED ITSELF I'M AS HIDEOUS AS TWO FACE EVER WAS!"
FASSY, SOULD I HAVE BEEN WORSE? THE ACID MIGHT HAVE DESTROYED YOUR SIGHT!
OF COURSE I WIN AGAIN-- SINCE I HAVE EACH PIECE I NEED, WHICH WITH AN INCISIVE MIND, I'VE DEDUCED THROUGH MY DARK GLASSES!
BUT THE SMALL PICKINGS OF A CARNIVAL ATTRACTION DO NOT SATISFY THE CROOKED PUZZLE MASTER!
I'LL NEVER ENOUGH BAUBLES TO BUY EVEN TO BATMAN YES! AND DON'T YOU DON'T KNOW! PUZZLING CRIMES!
MY ACTING CAREER IS FINISHED! THE ONLY ROLE I'LL EVER PLAY NOW IS TWO-FACE! AND I WON'T EVEN NEED ANY MAKEUP! THERE'S NOTHING MY FACE COULD STAND FOR TWO-FACE!
I HOPE THIS DOESN'T AFFECT HIS MIND! REMEMBER WHAT IT DID TO HARVEY DENT?
IT'S NATURAL TH INITIAL SHOCK WI MR. BITTERMAN NOW, TOMORROW TALK TO YOU OF SURGERY AG
DEAL MAKE EACH CRIME A MYSTERY AND THE BEWILDERING PUZZLES I'LL SAW -- AND ALWAYS I'LL BE ONE STEP AHEAD OF AN APPREHENSIVE COSGROVE!
SO IS BORN ONE OF THE STRANGEST OF ALL ENEMIES, THE DANGEROUS RIDDLER, KNOWN AS--
THE RIDDLER! WHAT'S THAT? FOR THAT'S MYSELF, IF YOU PLEASE! I'LL BE THE RIDDLER!
BUT THE SHOCK HAS AFFECTED SLOANE'S MIND TO A GREATER DEGREE THAN IMAGINED...
ANYONE'S SILVER DOLLAR! IT HAS TWO FACES--CLEAN AND HANDSOME AS WAS MINE! I'LL MAKE ONE OF THE FACES VEGAS, JUST LIKE MINE!
THUS EVEN THOUGH HE IS UNAWARE OF IT, SLOANE BEGINS TO LIVE THE PART OF TWO-FACE ...
A COIN WITH TWO FACES -- LIKE MINE! WHICH FACE WILL TURN WHEN I FLIP THE COIN! UP WHEN I FLIP THE COIN!
STOP, MR. SLOANE!
THE FINAL SIDE WINS! CRIME FROM THIS DAY ON! THIS TWO-FACED COIN WILL BE THE SYMBOL OF TWO-FACE!
ALMOST EXACTLY THE FACE, I IMAGINED IT!
THAT NIGHT, AS A CROWD WATCHES GOTHAM CITY NEWSBOY ANNOUNCING HIS ADMISSTRING SIGN--CLEVERES!
"THE CROSS CLEANING CO PRESENTS ITS MONTHLY CROSSWORD PUZZLE FOR YOUR ENTERTAINMENT!"
WHILE THE SIGN'S CONTROL
A NEIGHTON PRODUCTION
MICHELLE AUSTIN, MD
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wraparound cardboard reprint cover which contained it), or the reprints of **Action** #1 or **Batman** #1 and believe they have the real thing! The reprints, which had the Johnson Smith & Co. ads on the back cover, omit the company address. These are the ads which featured about 50 different items and must have been impossible to read on the original comics since they are still almost impossible to read with the print enlarged in tabloid size!"

While Bob Kane clearly created Batman, that the character was immediately refined with the help of Bill Finger is apparent. Finger filled the character and background with detail prior to scripting the first story and in **The History of Comics** Vol. 1 by Jim Steranko (published in 1970), Finger recalls those early creative stages.

"My first script was a take-off on a Shadow story. But I didn't want Batman to be a superman; I wanted Batman to be hurt. Everything he did was based on athletics, on using his astute wits and acute observation.

"Bruce Wayne's first name came from Robert Bruce, the Scottish patriot. Wayne, being a playboy, was a man of gentry. I searched for a name that would suggest colonialism. I tried Adams, Hancock...then I thought of Mad Anthony Wayne.

"Originally I was going to call Gotham City, Civic City. Then I tried Capital City, then Coast City. Then I flipped through the phone book and spotted the name Gotham Jewelers and said 'that's it,' Gotham City. We didn't call it New York because we wanted anybody in any city to identify with it. Of course, Gotham is another name for New York.

"I patterned my style of writing Batman after the Shadow," Finger continued. "Also after the old Warner Brothers movies, the gangster movies with Jimmy Cagney, George Raft, Bogart. I always liked that kind of dramatic point of view. It was completely pulp style. Sometimes I overdid it, writing phrases like 'Night mantles the City.'

While Batman and most all comic book heroes of that time were heavily influenced by the hero pulp magazines of the day, Batman was no more based on these than any other. Some have incorrectly accused The Batman of being inspired by the pulp hero The Black Bat who is similar in many ways. But the catch is that both characters appeared almost simultaneously, and in fact Batman appeared first. The Black Bat first appeared in the issue of **Black Book Detective** that was cover-dated July 1939. While each publisher thought that the other had somehow stolen the other's character, DC editor Whitney Ellsworth did some behind-the-scenes intervening which settled things down.

Bob Kane actually got his idea for The Batman from the Mary Roberts

Rinehart novel **The Bat** which he had seen as a silent film in the Twenties. In that book The Bat is a mysterious masked villain so Kane just turned the idea around.

The origin of the Batman did not appear in **Detective** #27 and was not revealed until #33 as a two-page vignette. In issue #36 Batman first sported gauntlets with fins.

The Batman was of the school of rich idlers who don masks to fight crime. In the pulps this was best exemplified by The Spider, while on radio it was The Green Hornet. Batman would even acquire a super-car not unlike the Hornet's Black Beauty.

What set Batman apart from Superman was that while the orphan from Krypton set out to sow justice across his adopted world, Batman struck out in the name of vengeance. When Bruce Wayne saw his parents shot down before his eyes by the thug Joe Chill, he was so traumatized by the event that it shaped his existence forever after. Some people have analyzed the character and come to the conclusion that what sets him apart from other characters is that he's not just driven, but insane. There's a grim exactness about The Batman. He *always* responds to the summons of the Bat Signal, even in the recent story in **Detective** #542 when he was in the middle of an important meeting on whose outcome might weigh the future of his new ward. Bruce Wayne *must* heed the call of The Batman as though it has become some inbred call of the wild.

Cartoonist Dave Sim, who has lampooned all facets of comics in his monthly **Cerebus, The Aardvark**, picked on Batman specifically when he created the insane crimefighter The Roach (who became Captain Cockroach who became Wolveroach).

In **Detective** #38 it was decided that Batman should gain a youthful sidekick that the younger readers could identify with. Only someone who wasn't a younger reader would have thought this a swell idea.

The origin of Robin, Dick Grayson, was that he was a circus performer with his parents, but they were killed when criminals sabotaged their trapeze act. Batman brought the foes to justice and adopted Robin as his ward. Robin would remain his ward and did not even seem to age until some 25 years later in the Sixties when Robin was finally portrayed as being in high school. It would be several more years before the team of Robin and Batman broke up, and then Batman would seek out a new Robin.

The final solo Batman story of this early period, which had been scheduled for **Detective** #38, actually did not appear until **Batman** #1 where the dark night detective battled Prof. Hugo Strange and the bizarre monsters he created.

Bill Finger scripted only the first handful of Batman stories before editor Whitney Ellsworth decided he wanted a new writer, by the name of Gardner Fox, to write the strip. Fox introduced a love interest for Bruce Wayne named Julie Madison. He then scripted one bizarre story after another in which to imperil her. Fox also introduced the Batarang and the Batgyro, which would launch a tradition of Batgizmos which were to follow through the years.

In September 1939, Jerry Robinson was acquired by Bob Kane to act as his assistant. It was Robinson who came up with the name for Batman's sidekick, taking it from Robin Hood and even helping to design the costume. But for years Robinson was kidded because people believed that Robin was taken right from Jerry's own name.

Jerry Robinson, who was only 17 at the time, came up with the idea for the Joker. While initially using a playing card to base the character design on, this was abandoned when Bill Finger showed Robinson a photo of Conrad Veidt in the film *The Man Who Laughs*. The still, even today, is an obvious dead ringer for the Joker.

There initially was no origin for the Joker and he appears in the first and last stories in **Batman** #1. This was a much more malevolent Joker than has usually been seen in later years. His victims were all poisoned with a drug which took exactly 24 hours to take effect and left the victims with a hideous rictus grin on their faces. He was just one of many wild and crazy villains who would populate the series over the years, most of whom appeared on the Batman television series of the mid-Sixties. When Neal Adams did his own version of the Joker in 1973, he decided that the Joker was and always had been homosexual. So he not only returned the original ruthlessness to the character, but added veiled references to this aspect as well. When Bob Kane had this then-recent alteration pointed out to him at the 1973 New York Comic Art convention, he was taken aback and struck speechless. He actually seemed relieved when, after claiming that *he* had invented the Joker, it was pointed out that Jerry Robinson actually deserved the credit. Kane sort of reluctantly accepted that and said, "Well, maybe Robinson did invent the Joker, but I invented Batman!"

Writer Bill Finger actually had let the Joker die in his second appearance in **Batman** #1, but editor Whitney Ellsworth recognized the potential future use for the character and had the last panel hastily redrawn to reveal that after The Batman and Robin had left, an ambulance attendant found that the Joker would live after all. If any villain ever went on to make what could be called "countless" reappearances, it's the Joker. For a time in the Seventies he even had his own magazine!

While the Bob Kane credit remained on the strip for many years, many other artists drew the adventures of Batman and Robin. There was Jerry Robinson himself (who had been inking Kane's work for some time but whose own art was actually much better than Kane's) as well as Dick Sprang, whose art became most identified with the character in the late Forties and Fifties.

In the Fifties the Batman and Superman became just about the only costumed characters to survive in their own titles after the fall of the Golden Age in the late Forties. But their books in the Fifties were too often plagued by monsters and aliens from space as well as aliens from the past and future. The Superman/Batman teamup title **World's Finest** was much the same, if not moreso, throughout the Fifties and into the Sixties.

BATMAN

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In 1964 it was decided to try to modernize Batman somewhat and so the "new look" Batman and Robin were introduced. This largely consisted of making Carmine Infantino the main artist as well as bringing on a newer, smaller, sleeker Batmobile than the huge old roadhog he'd been driving for years. And yet the old one was much more atmospheric. It was after all just a funky old comic so what did it matter if the old Batmobile looked to be half the size of a Mack truck?

It was also at this time that the unfortunate Batsignal background was added to Batman's chest emblem. Putting something bright in the middle of Batman's chest always struck me as just like drawing a bullseye as an invitation to killers. (Frank Miller actually turned this around in **Dark Knight #1** and gave a reason why The Batman would want this just so).

Just a couple years later the "campy" tv series went on and became an instant hit. Many of us cringed while watching it, and yet we accepted it. What other filmed superhero fare did we have, after all? **The Green Hornet** a year later was much straighter but apparently tv audiences wanted yucks along with their crimebusting dering do.

The worst part was that so long as the tv series was on, the comic book actually reflected the campy approach. In one low moment an editorial reply to a letter complaining about this change stated quite matter-of-factly that so long as the tv series was on, the comic book would reflect it. Actually the series did boost comic book sales and when the show was cancelled, a notable slump took place in the comic book market.

In the Seventies Neal Adams, a former comic strip assistant of Stan Drake, swooped down on DC and all but remade The Batman in his own image. Along with writer Denny O'Neil, Adams attempted to bring back the old style, even to changing the hero's name back to *The* Batman for the first time in 30 years. Robin was quickly hustled off to college and The Batman was once again a grim loner. With classic villains like the Joker and Two-Face brought back, as well as such new characters as the Man-Bat bought in, Batman was receiving more personalized attention than he had since his inception.

Other writers also teamed with Adams to bring the new/old moody look to the Batman's adventures — people like Len Wein and Frank Robbins. Some of the issues featuring the Neal Adams version of Batman include **Detective Comics #**'s 395, 397, 400, 402, 404, 407, 408 and 410, **Batman #**'s 234, 237, 243-245, 251 (which features The Joker, as described earlier) and 255 (in which Batman battles a real werewolf). **Brave & The Bold** feature various Adams-drawn team-ups, but the oddest was in #93 in which Batman encountered **The House of Mystery**. Inked by Adams as well, it's a special treat.

Several of these Neal Adams Batman stories were reprinted in tabloid format in **Batman Limited Collector's Edition #**'s C-25 ("Ghost Of The Killer Skies," the Batman/Enemy Ace story), C-44 ("Paint A Picture Of Peril"), C-51 (the entire Ra's Al Ghul series all in one volume), and C-59 (a treasure trove reprinting **Brave & Bold** #93 and "A Vow From The Grave" from **Detective #**410 as well as **Swamp Thing #**8). "Night Of The Reaper" was reprinted in the tabloid **The Best Of D.C. Vol. 1** (C-52).

And yet the Batman which was done most like his 1939 version was captured by Bernie Wrightson in the aforementioned **Swamp Thing #**8. Here we have the strange, long ears on the cowl as well as a panel on page 12 in which the Batman is straddling two ledges and the wind is blowing the cape out in front of him. But the cape looks to be about eight feet long! Page 16 of the same story features a panel in which Wrightson is paying obvious artistic homage to the art of Neal Adams. Only Michael Golden ever drew a Batman as moody as Wrightson did.

An often under-rated artist who has kept up the Neal Adams Batman tradition over the years, beginning in the early Seventies even while Adams was active with the character, is Jim Aparo. Over the past sixteen years, he's probably drawn The Batman more than any other single artist. "Deathmask!" in **Detective #**437 is a prime example of the Aparo Batman.

Two issues later, in **Detective #**439, writer Steven Englehart tackled the Batman as a man driven by the old vengeance motive in "Night Of The Stalker!". The art by Sal Amendola was very much in the Neal Adams tradition as Batman savagely tracks down the fleeing criminals who gunned down a boy's parents before his eyes. The final page shows a Batman who has never recovered from the trauma of his own parents death decades before.

In **Detective** #433 (1974), Walt Simonson, now well known for his work on **Thor**, tackles Batman in the final chapter of his classic Manhunter series (recently reprinted by D.C. in a single volume). Simonson did Wrightson one better by not only including a panel where Batman's cape looks eight feet long (page 5), but one where the cape looks twelve feet long (page 7)!

Periodically other writers and artists

have come along over the past decade who liked what Neal Adams did with the Batman and who wanted to do more of the same. In 1977, Steve Englehart teamed up with artists Marshall Rogers and Terry Austin in **Detective** 471-476, 478 & 479 to produce a brief yet exciting run of the character in which Hugo Strange returns only to be murdered, but his spirit returns to exact revenge a couple issues later. There were also appearances by The Joker and a new version of Clayface. Marshall Rogers had drawn Batman previously in **Detective** #468 but it wasn't anything special until Englehart's stories gave him more than the usual to work with.

But when Englehart and Rogers left the character there were many others interested in trying their hand. Michael Golden drew a slick and moody Batman in **Batman** #295 as well as in **Batman Family** #19 and 20. The story in #19 was inked by Craig Russell whose work on Batman we'd see again soon. Golden also drew Batman in the 68 page **Batman Spectacular** (Summer '78) in a 20 page story. The same issue features an excellent 30 page story drawn by Mike Nasser and Josef Rubinstein as well as a 15 page picto-fiction story written by Denny O'Neil and illustrated by Marshall Rogers.

Batman Family/Detective Comics #481 features a fine 17 page Marshall Rogers Batman tale using the common strange detective tale motif. Even stranger was "Murder In The Night!" in the same issue, which was part one of a two part story. With writing and layouts by Jim Starlin and finished art by Craig Russell, we have another long-caped, slick Batman. This time his foe is an old man who has transferred his mind into the body of a powerful white ape. The twenty page finale leaves us with a 36 page story by Starlin and Russell which stands as one of the best ever presented. Unfortunately they didn't do any other Batman stories. It was almost as though they were dabbling to see what the result would be.

In the Eighties, The Batman has been drawn by many D.C. regulars, especially the late Don Newton. In **Detective** #526, Jason Todd, who would become the new Robin, is introduced. The Gerry Conway story was drawn by Don Newton and Alfredo Alcala. The parents of Jason, who are circus people, are brought in to help on a case because of information they stumbled on to. But they're trapped and murdered by the inhuman King Croc and just as Bruce Wayne experienced in "Night Of The Bat," Dick Grayson experiences a flashback of grief to his own parents deaths. The story also features The Joker, Clayface, Two Face, The Penguin and others in a 56 page story. The issue marked the 500th appearance of Batman in **Detective Comics**.

Even more recently notable is **Batman Special #1** (1984) which features a 40 page story by Michael Golden and Mike DeCarlo. Apparently Golden was unable to finish it as about the last ten pages seem to be entirely by DeCarlo.

Other artists have created notable stories of The Bat-Man. Gene Colan did some interesting tales. But other than the occasional flash of brilliance such as by a Michael Golden, nothing of a really spectacular nature took place for years. Batman did continue to exhibit a powerful and primal charm for newer artists. Many were drawn as if by a magnet and contributed a tale or two to the mythos. Frank Miller contributed an early story to the series. A Christmas story no less. Other talents, Adams, Starlin, Russell, Golden and Rogers have all shown that the character retains a magic waiting to be drawn to the surface.

In the works is live-action Batman motion picture which intends to approach the character with the same respect as the first Superman motion picture used in 1978. Word has it that some of the storyline is being based on the Englehart/Rogers issues of **Detective** from 1977 (which were recently repackaged as **The Shadow Of The Batman**, thus bringing them to the attention of new readers, such as movie producers who haven't read **Batman** in 20 years). The film, at the moment, is supposed to be directed by Tim Burton (**Pee Wee's Big Adventure** as well as director of a marvelous short film **Frankenweenie** and the stop-motion short **Vincent**). But the film has been in the throes of preproduction, with no announced cast, since 1985, so anything could happen. It will definitely bare no resemblance to the mid-Sixties tv show. Adam West reportedly approached the producers about being in the feature but they said that the most they would do is invite him to the premiere as they want to stay as far away from identification with the goofy tv series as possible. A fan sponsored letter-writing movement is currently underway to get Adam West in the Batman film (a movement dubbed by Harlan Ellison, on the radio show **Hour 25**, as one of the "Great stupid projects of mankind"). One wag has even remarked that if Adam West should play Bruce Wayne's father in the film then he could actually look forward to the murder of Bruce Wayne's parents!

The biggest thing to hit Batman most recently, of course, is **Dark Knight** by Frank Miller, as well as Miller's modern Batman origin, **Batman: Year One**.

Recent rumors of Steve Englehart reteaming with Marshall Rogers on Batman were true as far as they went, but the plans fell apart during their negotiations with DC.

Dick Grayson is no longer part of the Batman team, having quit to be Nightwing in **Teen Titans**. The new Robin underwent a first for a character when he was beaten up by a crowd in the **Legends** mini-series, a sequence which didn't ring at all true. Since when have you ever heard of a crowd beating up a young boy who had committed no crime other than wearing a costume? The scene symbolized the way credulity has been stretched left and right and out of shape in **Legends**.

Batman has been through a lot and has emerged as a legend almost with a life of his own. His 50th anniversary will come to pass in 1989 and while Superman has shown so much wear that a complete retread was recently required to try to insure his continued longevity, Batman hasn't required such major surgery. While different creators interpret the character in different ways, the essence of the legend always shines through.

NEXT ISSUE: THE DARK KNIGHT

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THE Fantastic Four

If Superman revolutionized comic books in 1938, then the **Fantastic Four** changed the face of comics in the Sixties. It was the flagship book of the then new Marvel line of superhero comics.

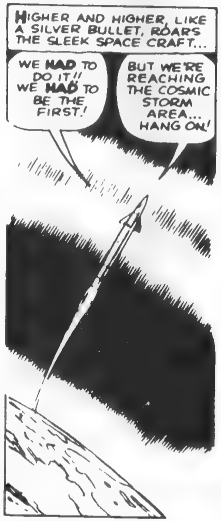
Although on the surface the origin of the Fantastic Four seems quite simple, it has become shrouded over the years in claims and counter-claims. None were cleared up by Stan Lee's 1974 book, **Origins of Marvel Comics**, in which Lee claimed to have single handedly created all of Marvel's most famous characters and then turned them over to someone such as Jack Kirby to drew as though he were a secondary cog in the creative machine.

Jack Kirby drew the first 102 issues of the magazine [as well as several annuals] and to this day his stamp of creativity remains on the book, not like a ghost haunting every panel but rather as a spirit infusing it with life. When Kirby left the book it was his approach that was imitated time and again, but the closest anyone could come was to recycle characters and villains that Kirby created during his long tenure on the series.

That Kirby was increasingly unhappy over the years with the way his efforts were acknowledged was a behind-the-scenes fact of life which did not come to light until he shocked Fandom by leaving Marvel for DC in 1970. Kirby at DC? Marvel without Jack Kirby? It was an impossible concept when you consider that in the early to mid-Sixties Kirby drew almost every single Marvel superhero comic series going during that time, including Sgt. Fury but excluding Spider-Man. This is when the chinks in Marvel's creative history first began to come to light.

In **The Rocket's Blast Comicollector #81,** an early comics fanzine, Jack Kirby was interviewed by Bruce Hamilton about why he switched to DC. "At DC I'm given the privilege of being associated with my own ideas. If I did come up with an idea at Marvel, they'd take it away from me and I lost all association with it. I was never given credit for the writing which I did. Most of the writing at Marvel is done by the artist from the script."

Regarding the **Fantastic Four** in particular Kirby went on to say, "It was my idea. It was my idea to do it the way it was; my idea to develop it the way it was. I'm not saying that Stan had nothing to do with it. Of course he did. We talked things out. As things went on, I began to work at home and I no longer came up to the office. I developed all the stuff at home and just sent it in. I had to come up with new ideas to help the strip sell. I was faced with the frustration of having to come up with new ideas and then having them taken from me."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BUT WE'RE REACHING THE COSMIC STORM AREA... HANG ON!

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In **Origins of Marvel Comics,** Stan Lee described the genesis of the book with Kirby waiting in the wings to accept the book as a **fait accompli** after all the really creative work was finished. Lee described a meeting with Martin Goodman wherein Goodman suggested that a superhero team book would be a good idea since DC's **Justice League of America** was selling very well. Lee also wanted to do a comic book such as he himself would like to read, one where the characters would not have secret identities and would also have genuine human emotions. The closest Lee comes to giving Kirby any creative credit is when he says, "After kicking it around with Martin and Jack for awhile I decided to call our quaint quartet The Fantastic Four. I wrote a detailed first synopsis for Jack to follow, and the rest is history." Of his working relationship with Kirby, Lee explained, "I had only to give Jack an outline of a story and he would draw the entire strip, breaking down the outline into exactly the right number of panels replete with action and drama. Then it remained for me to take Jack's artwork and add the captions and dialogue." This is not as simple as it sounds.

A comic book plot is generally a simple outline written on a couple sheets of paper, and when an artist and writer have been working together for any length of time at all it can be nothing more than a phone call. This is the Marvel style of writing. The artist is left to break the story down, establish how the conflict looks and add his own flourishes. In order to do this coherently the artist must write notes on the border of the page of art next to each panel describing the progression of the story. This often includes the dialogue so that the writer winds up just putting it in his own words. Whether the artist gets a co-author credit remains to be seen. In the case of Lee and Kirby this progressed to the point that Kirby was literally writing each book he drew and Lee just did the captions and dialogue at the end while still taking a full writing credit. This caused some unforeseen problems for Kirby later as other writers looked forward to working with Kirby and getting the same kind of sweetheart deal in which Kirby did the lion's share of the writing.

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That Lee had an important input cannot be disputed, even if it was in rewriting Kirby's own captions and dialogue into a perhaps more dramatically satisfying form. This can be seen when comparing the Lee/Kirby comics with Kirby's solo books at DC. The visuals had the same impact but the writing style was missing something, then and now. His strengths clearly lie in creating and plotting. In **Silver Star #1**, a 1983 comic from Pacific Comics, one of Kirby's lines of dialogue reads, "Hey!

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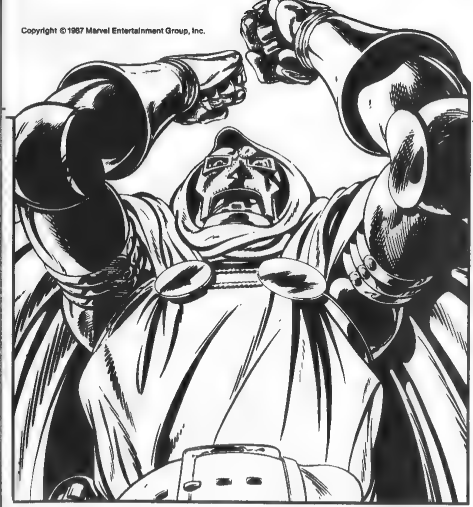


Come on, mister big! Don't rattle your gonads in **my** ears!" How picturesque, not to mention incongrous in the context.

While in more recent years Jack Kirby has been reluctant to discuss his early years at Marvel, in **The Spirit #38** ("Kitchen Sink", February '83) Kirby once more dwells on his early creative years at Marvel in an interview conducted by Will Eisner. He describes his returning to Atlas in the late Fifties on a dark day when the company was contemplating going out of business, and that he urged Stan Lee to hold it together because he had some ideas he wanted to institute about bringing back superheroes which were on the wane at the time. Lee supposedly gave Kirby's ideas credence because Kirby hadbeen a mover and shaker at Timely [which became Atlas which became Marvel] in the early Forties. Kirby is, after all, the co-creator of Captain America along with Joe Simon. What the interview fails to explore is why Kirby's ideas [which included Spider-Man] were not instituted until several years of monster books had foraged the newsstands under the Atlas imprint, books in which Kirby was the mainstay.

While there is no doubt that Kirby was a prime force in the creation of the Fantastic Four and perhaps the main force behind its most memorable issues, Stan Lee was an important force as well, although not quite the pivotal voice of creation he makes himself out to be in **Origins of Marvel Comics.**

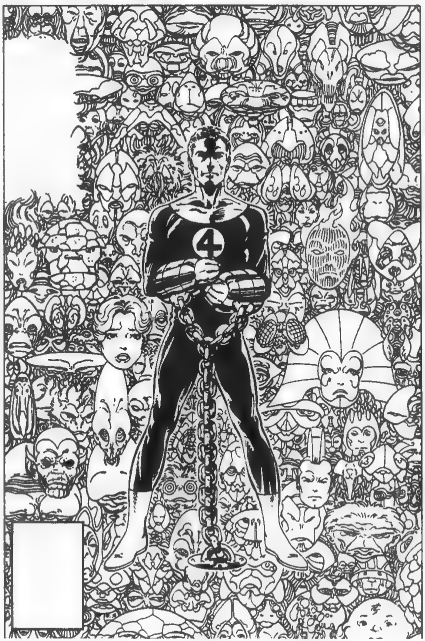
Those early issues of **Fantastic Four** show the raw creative energies at work, as well as not quite as much analysis as goes into a story today. Their origin consists of Reed Richards stealing a rocket which he'd overseen the construction of so that they can "beat the Commies into space." He needs Ben Grimm as a pilot but Sue comes along because of that "where you go I do" chestnut and her kid brother Johnny Storm accompanies them for the same reason. How scientific. For some reason the ship isn't shielded against cosmic rays and their exposure to them changes the foursome. Upon crash landing they each find they've been transformed. In one of the sillier moments of this scene, when Ben Grimm changes into an orange-skinned behemoth, he becomes so angry that he grabs a tree and breaks it off in his hands. But why would he have had any inkling he could even do this? It's not exactly your average reflex reaction. The only reason all this wonderful hokum works when you read it is because it happens quickly [unlike the wordy, overwritten panels in Marvel Comics today]. The artwork by Kirby is strangely atmospheric, certainly much different even than the monster books he'd been drawing at the time and different from the way his work would change over the years. It has a very menacing air about it. They were certainly not trying to imitate a DC comic.

The second issue of FF introduced the Skrulls from outer space in a plotline which was picked up in a later Fantastic Four Annual. Issue four revived the Sub-Mariner, a popular character in Timely Comics of the Forties. But issue #5 introduced their quintessential nemesis—Doctor Doom. There was a furious imagination at work in those early issues as that single issue not only introduced Dr. Doom, gave a capsule origin, but also had the Fantastic Four forced to undertake a mission back in time—and it was all perfectly balanced. There was an art then in telling a story in a single issue, and leaving the reader satisfied. It had tension, suspense and a fast-paced plot. In issue #6 Dr. Doom returned in a team-up with the Sub-Mariner. Namor returned in #9 and Dr. Doom returned in #10, and yet you enjoyed

how these return engagements were handled. There was a freshness about them rather than having them seem as if they just didn't have any better ideas. The people producing these comics actually seemed to like what they were doing, and on a monthly basis. You could tell that they looked forward to writing and drawing the next issue as much as we looked forward to reading it.

One of the nagging secrets in the F.F. over the years is what Dr. Doom looks like under his mask. While Darth Vader's true appearance was revealed in **Return of the Jedi,** Dr. Doom's true likeness will doubtless remain shrouded in mystery, at least within the pages of the comic. Jack Kirby has always been free with the facts about the good Doctor. "Dr. Doom was a perfectionist. Dr. Doom was a handsome guy and he had to hide his face in a steel mask because he had a scratch on his face. He couldn't stand that scratch." One wonders if he never heard of plastic surgery. At a convention some years ago, Jack Kirby did a drawing of Doom without his mask and it was indeed a man with a small scratch on his cheek. Some fans believed that Doom bore an uncanny likeness to Stan Lee but Kirby denied any such intent towards resemblance

Those first few years of the F.F. featured a creative explosion incomparable in any other comic book title. The first 67 issues saw the birth of such characters as the Skrulls, Dr. Doom, Puppet Master, The Watcher, the Red Ghost and his super apes, the Mad Thinker, Dragon Man, Diablo, the Inhumans, the Black Panther, Galactus, the Silver Surfer, Klaw, the Frightful Four and the strange being Him (who under other hands became known as Warlock. Then the torrent ceased. One could sense an unseen hand turning off the flow. After issue 67 no new major characters were created. It just



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became a revolving cycle of appearances by old characters such as Dr. Doom, Galactus, the Silver Surfer and yet another Thing-on-the-rampage story. Kirby was holding back and it was clearly evident that this was so. He was obviously tired of creating something and not only watching Stan Lee take the bows but seeing Marvel absorb the character into their widening stable of successful Jack Kirby creations. So Kirby put on the brakes, did good work, but did not give the book that extra creative juice which had boosted it to popularity over the years, and the most telling aspect of all this is that Stan Lee was unable to pick up that slack or infuse the book with new major characters of his own. 'Nuff said.

When Kirby left the book the word came down that the F.F. must still have the Kirby look. The problem was that in imitating the art they neglected to imitate the necessary creativity,if such is even possible. So the years went by with a round robin of writers and artists doing pretty much what Kirby himself had done during his last three years on the title. There were glimmers of interest over the years but under the almost constant inks of Joe Sinnott (who did such a wonderful job inking Kirby), all the art looked the same and any character which might have been brought to the book by a different penciller was submerged under Sinnott's inks. Even when George Perez (who's work on DC's **Teen Titans** book has made him one of the most popular artists in comics today) drew the F.F. back around '77, Sinnott did not ink to bring out Perez's strengths in drawing but rather to make it look like Joe Sinnott art, including having the male characters constantly gnashing their teeth (i.e. **F.F. #186,** page 6, panel 7, as well as many others in the same issue). The stuff had not only begun to look alike long before this, it did look alike. Even distinctly non-Kirby stylists like Bill Sienkiewicz had their art transformed into ersatz Kirby under the inks of Joe Sinnott.

Then came **F.F. #232.**

John Byrne, who as a child discovered the F.F. with their pivotal issue #5, became disenchanted with his working relationship with Chris Claremont on the **X-Men** and decided to look elsewhere for a book where he could stretch creatively. What he settled on was the F.F., which is still Marvel's flagship title. Byrne had previously drawn the F.F. a couple of years prior to this latest stint on it but he was not satisfied with the stories or his art. Once again those earlier issues had been inked by Joe Sinnott and that special **frission** found in Byrne's art was nowhere to be seen.

This time Byrne approached F.F. with a much stronger idea of what he wanted to do and this was heavily influenced by the **feelings** he had carried away from those early Lee/Kirby issues. His goal was to not only infuse the book with the same sort of energetic atmosphere of those early years, but to once more bring change and growth to the title, something which had been absent. The F.F. had long been a victim of recurring plot twiches such as losing their powers only to regain them one way or another a couple issues later. This has been done so often that whenever it reappears it's, "Oh, no, not this plot again!" Byrne has been very successful at capturing the feel of excitement of those early years although he has fallen victim to the Galactus syndrome. Another cliche has been to return Galactus, who must absorb the energies of Earth to live, only to have him bamboozled into leaving at the end of the story. He marked time with yet another one of those. Ho hum. Galactus, like most cosmic characters, became dull quickly because what can you do with him which hasn't already been done except to kill him?

One of the best of these earlier stories was "Terror in a Tiny Town" in #236 an amazingly effective story whose plot was borrowed uncredited from the Frederik Pohl science fiction story "Tunnel Under the World."

Byrne's writing on this title has been remarkably good considering he had little previously credited [outside of co-plotting the **X-Men**], other than **Marvel Two-In-One #50**, a sad attempt at scripting a nostalgic Sixties-style story which took a terrific idea and squandered it by having a silly ten-page fight scene in a 17-page story.

The only other problem with these Byrne issues is that he just doesn't know how to ink his own work for reproduction on the shoddy paper on which most comics are printed. Terry Austin may take some liberties when inking Byrne's pencils, but when Byrne inks them the result looks like much of the linework blotted during printing. Byrne would do better saving his inking for when his work will appear on whiter paper.

Some previous writers of the F.F. such as Len Wein and Marv Wolfman, have complained that Byrne is making too many sweeping changes by doing things such as summarily transporting the Great Refuge of the Inhumans to the blue area of the Moon. This is the whole point. The comic has been stagnant and predictable for a decade and Byrne is striving to change this, and succeeding. I've been reading the F.F. since #13 and I like what I see these days. When a comic has dubbed itself "The World's Greatest Comic Magazine!" as long as this one has, it's about time that it did something to earn it rather than resting on the laurels of what Jack Kirby did almost fifteen years ago.

NEXT ISSUE: THE NEW TEAM

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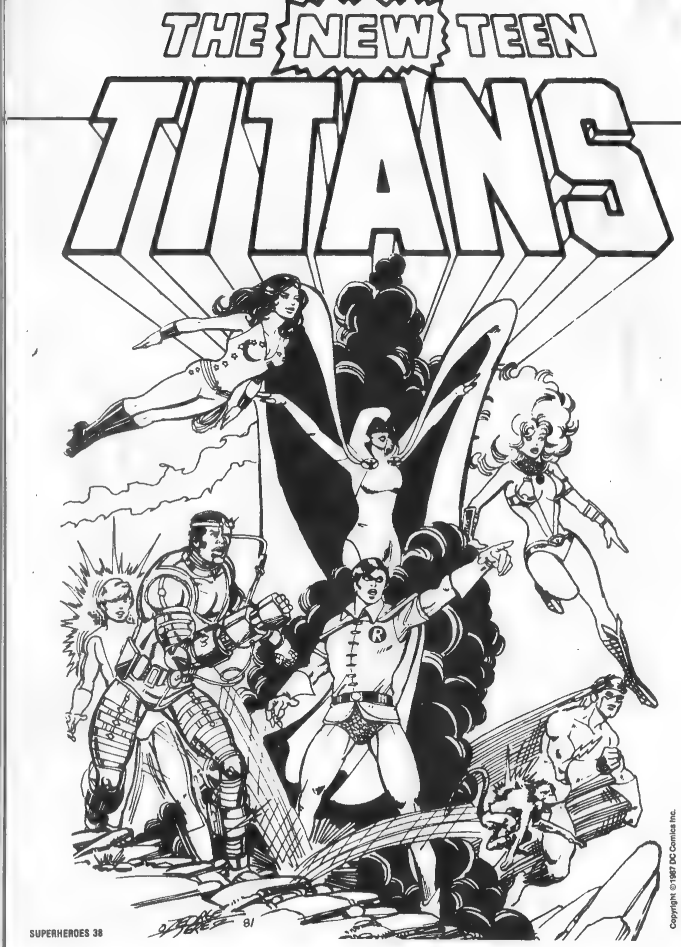

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Teenage sidekicks and second string heroes have never had any charm for me. I read the Sixties version of the Teen Titans. And even as the mid-teens comic reader I was at the time, I found the title to be lacklustre and superficial. As sidekicks they had been largely annoying. On their own or as a team they always seemed to be playing out of their league. Whether drawn with the harmless and unengaging super-heroics of artist Nick Cardy (who was definitely better drawing the more down to earth, tongue-in-cheek strips such as Bat Lash), or even with work by the premier superhero artist of the day, Neal Adams, the Teen Titans were still second rate heroes.

Thus when D.C. announced their revival under Marv Wolfman and George Perez, I decided to pass. I couldn't imagine the same characters being any less boring this time around than they were before. Even though George Perez is one of my favorite comic book artists, the subject left me cold.

A CHANGED ATTITUDE

But then I started hearing raves about the book. About the writing. Could teenage heroes really be anything better than silly and inept pretenders to the role of superheroes? Could I ever really care about characters who seldom had enough on the ball to keep from getting in their own way?

I gave the book a try with issue #10 and was hooked. This was *good* writing! The characters had believable personalities and the sense of jeopardy was genuine. The fact that several of the characters were new helped quite a bit as well. While I still had to put up with the likes of Robin, Kid Flash, Wonder Girl and The Changeling (a silly green character whom I'd disliked even when he was called Beast Boy), there were some new characters in the form of Raven, Cyborg and Starfire. These were so interesting that they overwhelmed the old tired ones from the days of yore. If you don't think that was the intention, take a look at how many of the old Titans are still around who were in the first issue of *The New Teen Titans*. Kid Flash is gone; Robin has become Nightwing. Wonder Girl has been so transformed under Wolfman and Perez as to be their own. They've turned her from what was a silly afterthought into one as interesting as any of the others. While it took the *X-Men* a couple of years to catch on in their new version, sheer creativity brought the *Teen Titans* from out of nowhere and made them a comic book sensation. It tends to restore one's faith in comics.

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THE CREATIVE TEAM

While Marvel seems unable to keep one creative team on a book for more than a few issues, D.C. tries to line up a team and keep them together. Thus Wolfman and Perez have been the creative force on this book for over forty issues (plus annuals, specials and a new, concurrently-running series). What's even more fascinating is that the book has built-in quality, layer upon layer, trying new things and deepening the richness of the stories. If anything, what has been a very good series has gotten even better, reaching an incredible peak with the four issue "Judas Contract" adventure.

The new version of the Teen Titans came about when Marv Wolfman left Marvel to work for D.C. Not wanting to take a title away from someone else, he preferred creating new ones which he could develop and explore. He wanted to do a Teen Titans comic and worked out a few ideas for it with editor Len Wein. But the Titans had been tried twice before by D.C. and failed both times. It wasn't until Marv had interested George Perez in drawing it that D.C. was willing to give it a try.

The first appearance was an introductory story and sneak preview in *D.C. Comics Presents #26* (July-August '78) which appeared about three months before the first issue of the comic. Most prognosticators, including artist George Perez, figured the book would last about six issues. Up until that time D.C. just didn't have a track record for successful new titles. But this one took off running, growing steadily in popularity. Like a good movie, word of mouth gave the book "legs" until by around issue #13 it had become the first D.C. title to sell over one hundred thousand copies in the direct market.

RAVEN

What helped to get this series moving is that each character had a working history before they were introduced—particularly the newest characters, who were actually the most interesting and colorful.

The new Teen Titans actually came to be via the manipulations of Raven who was trying to help Starfire, as well as herself.

While early issues of *The New Teen Titans* revealed who Raven was, it wasn't until issue #2 of the *Tales Of The New Teen Titans* mini-series that the origin was explored in detail.

Raven is the most intricate of the characters in the series. She remains aloof from the others and yet there is always something churning just below the surface. That is because she is the daughter of a demon. The demon Trigon. Trigon is the manifestation of all of the evil purged from the people of Azarath who established their kingdom between the dimensions ages ago. But the evils they exorcised from themselves were brought forth during a ceremony in another dimension, and the form they took on was Trigon.

Raven's mother is a woman who was used by practitioners of the black arts who were seeking to raise the devil. In his place appeared a handsome man whom Raven's mother became enthralled by and made love to. Only afterwards did she see beyond the image that Trigon had cast for himself, and what she saw was an inhuman horror and evil incarnate.

Trigon had mated with human women many times before but never before had one of his children survived through birth. This one ultimately would not have, either, had not a messenger from Azarath come to the woman as she was trying to commit suicide. He took her to the gleaming kingdom of Azarath which exits between all dimensions and was established by people who fled the hatred and warfare of mankind. There Raven was born and raised by Azar, the wise and aged woman who ruled them all. Raven was raised in the ways of pacifism as well as taught to submerge all of her emotions. She also learned the secrets of instantaneous travel and how to flow between dimensions. But she also ultimately learned of her soul self, which is her darker side—the part that is instilled with the essence of Trigon. Raven is also an empath who can heal pain and injury, but not disease.

Trigon has vowed to come for her one day and to use his hold over her to subvert all that she has learned. To make her his, once and for all. This is why she must submerge all her emotions. Unleashed, those emotions could be used by Trigon to manipulate her and draw her over to his ways. For part of her is Trigon, and always will be. It was also to aid her against Trigon that she sought out the Titans. While Trigon was not ready to take her to him when the Titans clashed with him in issue #6, the final conflict seemingly began to be unveiled with *The New Teen Titans #1* (1984). This is the direct market version whose stories will be reprinted in the regular newsstand title a year later.

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INTERESTING WOMEN

What's surprising about the Teen Titans when you stop and think about it is that the most interesting members of the book are female characters. All too often in comics, female characters tend to seem less well thought out, just conjured up to be the distaff version of a masculine hero (Supergirl, Spider-Woman, She-Hulk, Ms. Marvel) or just plain not that interesting because the creative people behind them fail to identify with the female superstars. But Raven is so interesting that the fact that she's a woman is not even an issue—her personality is. She is so interesting that she seems to be a natural character, not someone's attempt to cobble together a superheroine. The same is true of Starfire.

Here again we have a completely new hero with a history so well developed that she is much more in-

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teresting than other superheroes who have existed for decades. Starfire is much more than just her powers as she is a person with a past, and that past has an unpleasant habit of catching up with her. *That* is what Starfire is really all about. That is what we see standing there looking over her shoulder whenever we see her, no matter how innocent the situation. There is a cloak of dread which invisibly follows her. Yet we know that it may appear just when we least expect it.

Starfire is actually not of this earth, but is Princess Koriand'r of the planet Tamaran. The second child of the royal house, she was chosen to be given the title of princess, and thus the eventual succession to the throne. Her older sister Komand'r was sickly and lacked the perfect physique and abilities necessary to be considered for leadership. For one thing, Komand'r could not fly by riding the solar winds the way that Koriand'r could.

Komand'r took it upon herself to despise Koriand'r and attempt to make her life miserable even as a child. When they were sent to the planet Okaara to learn the arts of warfare to protect the peace and plenty they so cherished on Tamaran, Komand'r disgraced herself by trying to murder Koriand'r and was exiled. Komand'r took revenge by going to the Citadel world and siding with the enemies of Tamaran, betraying her home and seeing that Princess Koriand'r was sold into slavery. (See *Tales Of The New Teen Titans #4*).

But bad seemed to go worse when both Koriand'r and her evil sister were captured by the Psions, enemy of the Citadel and of all living creatures. An experiment to measure the endurance of Koriand'r and Komand'r to solar energy went awry. Instead of killing Koriand'r as was intended, it charged her with power far beyond the norm of her race. But Komand'r also gained new-found powers. When Koriand'r released her sister from the Psion's trap, Komand'r struck, defeating Koriand'r and showing her the folly of having compassion for her sister.

Imprisoned in an energy damper for a time, Koriand'r managed to escape in a shuttle. Some months later she landed on Earth where she met the Titans.

THE VILLAINS

Interestingly, when Marv Wolfman creates an important villain in the series, he doesn't bring the felon in on a regular basis to juice things up. Rather he continues creating new characters and situations and only returns the heavyweights when he's come up with a story worthy of their return. Trigon appeared only in issue #6. Outside of the flashback appearance in the origin of Raven, and a couple of occasional glimpses, he was not brought on stage again to command our full attention and face off against the Titans until the companion series began in *The New Teen Titans #1* in 1984. The same is true of the Terminator, who appeared in issue #2, #10 and then didn't tackle the Titans head on again until #34. Then he pulled some surprising manipulations on the team until the climax of "The Judas Contract" (but more on this later).

Brother Blood and his powerful religious sect appeared in #21 and 22, but important plot points in that story were not picked up and resolved until issues #40 and 41. Marv forgot that Brother Blood had seemingly discredited the Titans before the world as other stories kept pushing the follow-up aside. The follow-up was certainly worth the wait.

CONFLICT AND CHARACTER

All comic books depend on conflict and conflagration to maintain reader interest. What this series does is tie the conflict tightly to the characters. One of the best examples of this is the Starfire (Koriand'r) versus Komand'r angle. Right after the background of this brutal sibling rivalry was fully revealed in the Titan mini-series, the return of Komand'r, now known as Blackfire, was unleased in issues 23-25 and Annual #1 (with a two page revelation in #22 to let us know the worst was to come). Together these form a 112 page epic which stretched from Earth across space to the Citadel world where the final battle between Starfire and Blackfire finally took place. But since Blackfire's body was never found afterwards, it can be expected that she will be making another appearance when the time is ripe.

What has sustained this book and continued its growth is the emphasis on character. In *The Comics Journal #79*, Marv Wolfman explained that he

has done this by, "giving the subtext to our characters, so that we do understand what they feel like, more than the Thing's insecurity about being a monster or Spider-Man going around blaming himself. That, in the past, has sufficed for characterization. But that's not really characterization, that's sort of glossing over troubles. Troubles and characterization are not the same thing... At least George (Perez) and I are making the attempt now to dig into the characters deeper than surface problems."

Their commitment to characterization was made early and underscored in "A Day In The Lives..." in issue #8. No super villains—(although a set-up for a showdown with one in #9 begins here), the menaces encountered are more commonplace. What matters in this story is that one particular day is like in each of their lives. While Wally West (Kid Flash) visits with his parents and deliberates over concerns that would eventually cause him to drop out of the group, Starfire finds herself in demand by a commercial photographer. Cyborg finds that an old girlfriend can't deal with how prothestics have changed him since his accident. But even this leads to a touching interlude when Vic Stone meets a group of children playing in the park and discovers that they all attend a special school for crippled children learning to cope with prosthetics. This was an example of how Wolfman and Perez work together. While Marv Wolfman had just conceived Vic making friends with some children who aren't frightened by his appearance, George Perez added the element of the children also having prosthetics. But Raven, in keeping with the tortured inner life she lives, learns the hell she must go through when her soul self is too long gone from her body. This is one of the best of the early issues and showed the kind of experimentation which would become more frequent in the title.

In this same tradition is "Who Is Donna Troy?" in issue #38. No fists fly here. Instead the super-heroine Wonder Girl becomes a troubled young woman whose past is opening up to her a piece at a time, thanks to the detective skills of Robin. Who is she really? She was rescued from a fire by Wonder Woman many years before. But who was the baby that Wonder Woman took back to Paradise Island? Piece by piece, Robin unearths the answers while Donna, who very much wants to know the truth, also fears what she might learn. The answers form an intricate mystery, and one of the single, best issues in the series. It's an example of a point Marv Wolfman made when he said, "I think you can get rid of action for issues at a time as long as you have very complex storylines. And characterization." This was one of those issues that make you realize just how good comics can be.

These descents into a grittier reality are not as rare in this title as I've made them seem. Issues 26 and 27 told the stories of some runaways, and reflected just what awaits these young victims on the lonely streets. Some people objected that the comics are too real because a child died. But then realism was the whole point.

Realism was also the point with the introduction of Terra, a new teenage heroine who won admission to the group and the affection of readers. It was revealed that she was the daughter of The Terminator and a plant to destroy the group from within. The four issue climax of this story, called "The Judas Contract", brought to a conclusion a story which on one level had begun in issue #28, a year-and-a-half before. The amount of information and creativity in the four part climax in issue 42-44 and Annual #3 merely served to underscore Marv Wolfman's point when he said, "the *Titans* is finally getting as good as the readers said it was." This is no mere self-serving boast on Wolfman's part. When a series he has worked on continuously for over forty issues can continue to improve as dramatically as this one has, when it was already very good, it shows his commitment to creative excellence.

TEEN TITANS VS. X-MEN

The Teen Titans are often compared to Marvel Comic's X-Men. Fans had a chance to compare them in 1982 in the 60 page X-Men and Teen Titans teamup book written by Chris Claremont and drawn by Walt Simonson and Terry Austin. The problem with it was that despite the inclusion of the Terminator as a flunky for Darkseid, it read very much like an X-Men adventure. It lacked the subtle character interplay between the Titans such as is explored in the comic. There wasn't much interplay among the X-Men either because the story was so thick with event and plot complications. If there was any doubt whose book it really was, The Phoenix was a main element and the climax focused on the conflict between her and Cyclops. While it remains a fascinating and enjoyable story, it was definitely the X-Men meet the Teen Titans rather than the Titans meet the X-Men. But when you have that many characters meeting under one roof, it's kind of hard to find much room to breathe. With the breathtaking art by Simonson and Austin, it's only in retrospect that any deficiencies show up, if deficiencies they are.

THE NEW TEEN TITANS

The Teen Titans is now more than the kids' comic of boys' adventures that it was in the Sixties. Under Marv Wolfman and George Perez it has become as close to perfection as any regularly produced superhero title has come. The characters continue to grow and change. Robin has, after forty some years, finally shed his short pants and kiddie costume. Wonder Girl has a real identity at last. Raven and Starfire are fascinating female heroes. Even the annoying, cloying personality of The Changeling seems to be getting hammered into some semblance of maturity with the death of Terra.

It just goes to show that comics can be challenging as well as a lot of fun. So how come *The Teen Titans* is one of the few that consistently is?

THE NEW MUTANTS™

SUPERHEROES #4

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If the new X-Men were created to be an international team, the New Mutants followed this line even more closely to become a group with a truly cosmopolitan flavor. Created in 1982, the **New Mutants** can be seen as the turning point where Marvel consciously set out to create a very aggressively active mutant universe within the larger boundaries of the Marvel Universe.

Marvel Graphic Novel No. 4 introduces The New Mutants in a sequence reminescent of the section of **Giant Size X-Men** No. 1 wherein Prof. X finds the new X-Men one by one as their mutant abilities reveal them to a hostile human populace of their respective homelands.

The origin story, "Renewal," opens in Scotland where Moira MacTaggert (a friend to the X-Men, as revealed in past adventures) encounters 14 year old Rahne Sinclair, who has just manifested her mutant shape-changing ability before the angry eyes of Reverend Craig and his followers. Moira orders them off her land and rescues Rahne, deciding on the spot that only one person can help her — Prof. X!

In Rio De Janiero, Roberto da Costa is in the midst of an important soccer match when his strange power manifests itself. As a result he is targeted for kidnapping.

Another mutant, age 16, is Sam Guthrie, a coal miner's son who reveals his bizarre power when he rescues his boss during a deadly cave-in. Prof. X doesn't learn of this incident but instead young Sam is recruited, through deception, into The Hellfire Club.

In the Medicine Bow Mountains near Sudance, Colorado, the young Indian maiden, Danielle Moonstar, has also begun manifesting mutant powers, although hers are far more arcane and magical in nature. Her grandfather, Black Eagle, reveals that he has contacted an old friend, Charles Xavier, to help her best use her newly formed powers. These powers forsee her grandfather's death — an event brought about by a renegade member of The Hellfire Club bent on taking over the organization.

At Prof. Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters, Moira MacTaggert is there with Rahne and Prof. X is testing a young Vietnamese girl, Xi'an Coy Mahn. Her code name is Karma. She can possess a person's mind.

Along with his new pupils, Prof. X travels to Colorado in response to Black Eagle's summons. There they find the old Indian dead and Danielle under attack by men in battle armor. They are foiled by Karma, although in the battle, Danielle's pet mountain lion, Ridge-Runner, is killed.

In South America, another death occurs when Roberto's friend, Juliana, uses her body to protect her friend. She succeeds, but at the sacrifice of her own life. The men they're up against are cyborgs whose bodies were reconstructed after a vicious encounter once with the X-Men's Wolverine. Danielle uses this fact against them with the illusions she creates.

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Ultimately the group confronts and defeats Donald Pierce, leaving him to be dealt with by the ones he betrayed—the Hellfire Club.

Sam Guthrie recognizes how he had been duped and 2 weeks later arrives at the mansion at Prof. X's invitation and is finally accepted by the other members of the New Mutants.

WHEEEEEEEEEE
I HAVE NEVER MET SYRIN'S FATHER, SEAN CASSIDY, THE LEGENDARY BANSHEE... BUT THEY SAY HIS DAUGHTER HAS INHERITED MOST OF HER SIRE'S SKILL...

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NOT ANOTHER X-MEN

In the first issue of **The New Mutants**, the story occurs at a time when the X-Men are missing and Prof. X has done some serious soul-searching regarding the wisdom of having a fighting team. When Roberto asks if they are to become the new X-Men (a logical question since they have all been given uniforms identical with those originally worn by the X-Men years before), Prof. X has a curt reply. "There will be a School for Gifted Youngsters — whose students are mutants — but never again will there be the X-Men, a team of mutant super heroes. That chapter of my life is ended forever."

But even though Prof. X was totally opposed to the youngsters becoming a fighting team, fate would take the choice out of his hands.

In issue 2, the team encounters the new Sentinels, a team built under a government contract issued to Sebastian Shaw of The Hellfire Club. Surprisingly, The New Mutants defeat the monstrous robots seemingly with greater ease than the X-Men have in the past when they confronted the mutant-hunting monstrosities.

In issue 3, the alien Brood queen that's possessing Prof. X attacks the students, but they manage to drive it off. This story reaches its conclusion in **X-Men** 167 when the Brood is finally defeated. It then becomes apparent to Xavier that he had formed The New Mutants under the control of the Brood Queen as she was searching for genetically superior humans in which to implant her embryos.

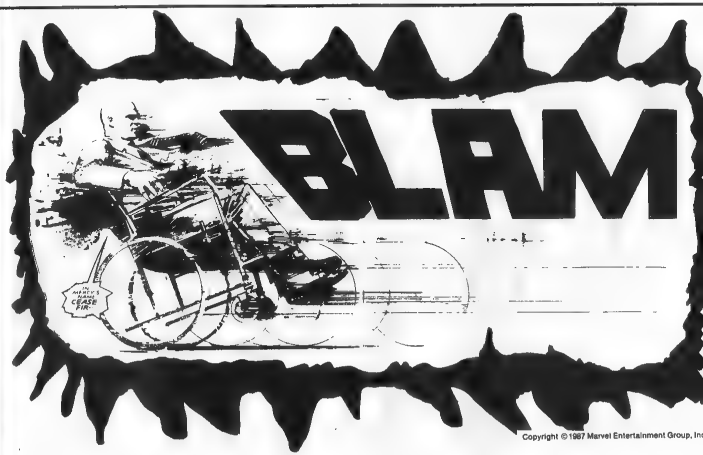
"Who's Scaring Stevie?" in issue 4 is an unusual story and is far more effective for that reason. No super-villains here. No mutant hunters or threat from The Hell Fire Club, but just a threatening phone caller to a friend of the New Mutants, a caller who is revealed to be a boy their own age who is suffering from abuse at the hands of his parents. That abuse has warped him, but in the end he may have been found out in time.

In issue 6, the climax features an explosion in which Karma is apparently killed — but it takes place offstage. The cliffhanger has Prof. X losing mental contact with the New Mutants when an explosion is set off in the structure the group is in. Prof. X says that he has to get to California as quickly as possible for he fears that something terrible has happened. But issue 7 opens up with the aftermath, as the group feels dejected over the loss of Shan. How exactly did they lose her? One has the feeling that an issue was missed and it's only a couple issues later that Roberto has a flashback to Shan slipping from his hand and falling off a cliff into the sea — a scene no reader had seen before even though it involved the death of an original member of the team. But even though Shan is gone, she somehow turns up on the masthead of issues 8 and 9.

Issues 8-11 deal with an adventure in a lost city in South America. The odd part is it's peopled with descendants of Roman legionaires—in South America? The protracted story introduces a new young mutant, Magma, in Issue 10. She joins Xavier's school in issue 13. Amara can absorb energy from the sun and transform it into power capable of manipulating tectonic forces. In other words she can cause earthquakes.

Illyana Rasputin, (the younger sister of Colossus) turns up in issue 14, fresh from her **Magic** mini-series, where she gained the powers of a demon sorceress. She too becomes one of the New Mutants, although the lines start getting pretty blurred when magic is regarded as a mutant power.

THE NEW MUTANTS



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A NEW MUTANT LOOK

Readers got a screaming eyefull of the new artist on the title when Bill Sienkiewicz took over with issue 18. His powerful, often impressionistic approach to the rendering of the super hero gave the book an exciting new look. Even writer Chris Claremont seemed enervated by his new collaborator as the storylines began taking strange directions tailormade for Bill's highly individualistic style of art.

Issues 18-20 feature the "Demon Bear" saga, a rare and powerful story dealing with the bear that has haunted Danielle Moonstar's dreams since before she joined the New Mutants. Now the time comes for her to face this demonic creature — it almost costs her her life. This story is conceived and executed on the level of a graphic novel as it is excellent in both art and scripting. Claremont reveals a grasp for fantasy that far exceeds even his mastery of the super-hero style of storytelling. He explores the abstract nature of magic while Bill Sienkiewicz renders it with such arresting images that one can't help but be drawn deeper and deeper into the horrific world it portrays.

A subplot in that story leads to the introduction of Warlock (no connection with the late Adam Warlock), an alien who becomes the next, and strangest, member of the New Mutants. He's a shape-changer but the real nature of his being is rather difficult to get a handle on. Weird describes him pretty well. Damn weird. He looks somewhat like an explosion in the shape of a human body and only a couple artists, such as Art Adams, have been able to capture his essense as well as Sienkiewicz does. His unveiling on page 16 of issue 21 is pretty startling and it takes a few issues for the eye to get used to scanning his image just because it's so — alien. Truly alien.

Warlock is fleeing from his father, Magus, and the New Mutants drive the elder off, this time, and welcome the alien into their midst.

Since **The New Mutants** is written by the same author as **The X-Men**, Chris Claremont explores parallel storylines and has characters affecting both titles. The Hellfire Club is primary among these as we see changes developing there as well as the introduction of Selene, who would come to figure prominently in **X-Men** encounters.

Another example of this is that the aftermath of Magneto's near fatal encounter with the X-Men (in issue 150) is seen briefly in **New Mutants** 23.

THE ROSTER

The ranks of The New Mutants have swelled to nine members now, including Karma who was revealed to be alive in issue 31. Horribly deformed, she regained her true form mystically in **The New Mutants Special Edition No. 1** (1985).

Karma: Real name Xi'an Coy Manh, she can possess the mind of another person and control their body.

Wolfsbane: Rahne Sinclair, she is a shapechanger who can turn into a wolf or into a combination of a wolf and a girl.

Mirage: Danielle Moonstar first went by the code name Psyche became telepathic and can project a person's innermost thoughts and fears in the form of 3-D hallucinations.

Sunspot: Roberto Da Costa can absorb the energy of the sun and then release it as superhuman strength, the action causing his body and clothing to turn black in the process.

Cannonball: Can transform himself into a human battering ram who is largely invulnerable when using his power. Real name Sam Guthrie.

Magma: Amara Aquilla can tap into the tectonic forces of the earth, transforming her body into that of some volcanic entity.

Magik: Illyana Rasputin is the sister of Peter Rasputin (Colossus of The X-Men) who was held prisoner in another dimension where she became a master of demonic magic.

Warlock: An alien shapechanger who can literally change into anything. He is still learning how to fit in to human society on earth.

Cypher: Doug Ramsey is the newest member, whose ability is to instantly be able to decipher all codes and languages. He has an inferiority complex because his power is not action-oriented the way that the abilities of the others are.

NEW MUTANTS, OLD MUTANTS

Issue 32 deals with the surprising discovery of Karma, albeit in a virtually unrecognizeable form. In the recap of the events which transpired when she vanished, and was presumably killed, yet another version of the incident is told in which Sunspot falls into the sea with her and only then loses his grip on her.

Finally in issue 34 it's revealed that Karma had been controlled by the astral form of Amahl Farouk, an evil mutant once defeated by Prof. X years before in Cairo. When he finally flees in defeat, Karma is left in a body huge and bloated by self-indulgence.

The New Mutants Special Edition No. 1 (which appeared in 1985 instead of an annual for that year) is actually a part of a larger story which deals with the X-Men and began in **X-Men/Alpha Flight** and concluded in **X-Men** annual 9. The main events in the **Special Edition** stand on their own and the 64 page issue stands as the single finest New Mutants tale to date and one of the best comics published in the past decade. Once again Claremont demonstrates a feel for dark fantasy which exceeds even his acknowledged expertise in handling superhero material.This is coupled with powerful pencilling by Arthur Adams, inking by Terry Austin and sensitive coloration by Christie Scheele. Adams displays a feel for drawing Warlock that is unexcelled. On pages 6 & 7 we see Warlock exploring the nature of swimming suits, including copying the bikini which Illya is wearing.

The organic circuitry of Warlock is brilliantly realized by Adams, such as in panel one on page 54 where Warlock's pointing finger is screaming and his throat has an exclamation point on it! Warlock's shapechanging even includes him becoming a Gumby clone on page 63. The issue has so much going for it that each character is given their moment in the sun — even Cypher who finally learns what it's like to be in the midst of a powerful battle. Instead of just being a long story in a giant-size format, this truly is a "special edition."

When the New Mutants return to earth and home in issue 35, they find that some changes have been rung down in their midst. As seen in **X-Men**, Prof. X has left and asked the now-reformed Magneto to take charge of his school and lead the New Mutants, an aspect of the continuity whose repercussions are still being felt to this day. The issue also features a scene which shows Magneto confronting some less than noble humans who had attacked one of his students, and he demonstrates what he can do and how fortunate the miscreants are that he is not the person he once was.

NEXT ISSUE: CHANGES

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DAREDEVIL

It was in the winter of 1964, January in fact, when Daredevil first appeared on the scene. Without any previous tryouts or even a guest shot in another title where he got into the inevitable battle due to a misunderstanding, Daredevil was unleashed. But Marvel was hedging their bets. The cover of the first issue was drawn by Jack Kirby and featured Spider-Man and the Fantastic Four in a sidebar although they don't appear in the story itself.

This was the last new title introduced to the original Marvel lineup of the early Sixties. The next time new superhero titles appeared was a couple years later, and it would only be some of their previously established characters getting their own magazines. New titles starring new superheroes were not as common on the Marvel scene 20 years ago as they are today.

From the beginning, Daredevil, like Iron Man and Giant-Man, was a second string hero. The character just didn't have the power and the fury of the majors such as Spider-Man, the Fantastic Four and Thor. As interesting as his origin was, elements of it were already starting to sound familiar in Marvel's hallowed House of Ideas. Once again (as with The Hulk, Fantastic Four and Spider-Man), Daredevil came to his powers from better living through atomic radiation.

Unlike other characters to whom combat was a skill picked up after they designed their costume, young Matt Murdock was already a self-taught fighter at the time of the accident which changed his life. His father, a boxer known as Battling Jack Murdock, recognized how that career had limited his life and thus forbade his son to follow any sort of path that might lead to the ring. But young Matt Murdock admired his father and so trained in secret. When Matt's mother died when the boy was eight, his father had sworn

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that Matt would receive a good education and not turn out to be "an uneducated pug like me."

The turning point in young Matt's life came one day as he was walking home from the library. Suddenly he sees an out-of-control truck careening towards a blind man who was crossing the street. Matt leaps heroically to the man's aid, knocking him out of the way and saving his life. But somehow a radioactive cylinder falls out of the truck and strikes Matt in the face, blinding him. When the origin is retold in issue 164 some alterations are made, perhaps in an effort to better explain how an atomic cylinder can fall out of a heavily fortified truck.

Although only 15 at the time of the accident, Matt rebounds from this huge setback and continues his studies by using braille. It is about this time that he begins to realize that he can function about as well as before his accident. He learns he has some kind of "radar sense," which enables him to sense objects near him. In issue 177, written by Frank Miller years later, it is revealed that Matt was trained to use this special sense by a man known only as Stick. A Zen master, Stick believes that everyone has a radar sense but that we fail to detect it because of our dependence on our eyes. When sight is gone, we become aware of this ability. Stick tutored Matt in its use and he became so proficient at it that he could function as well as a sighted person. In fact, even better!

Following High School, Matt enrolls in State College (where he meets Foggy Nelson) and then they transfer to Columbia University where both obtain their law degrees. As revealed in issue 168, while at Columbia, Matt met and fell in love with Elektra Natchios. The daughter of the Greek ambassador to the U.S., their affair lasted a year. When her father is killed while being held hostage by terrorists, she is emotionally shattered and leaves America to return to Greece. Matt will be an adult before he meets up with the extraordinary Elektra again.

Matt's father, meanwhile, has gone under contract to one Roscoe Sweeny (aka "The Fixer"). Battling Murdock began winning all his fights, unaware that they were fixed. The night of his championship bout, Sweeny orders Matt's father to take a dive. Murdock is shocked. But knowing that his son is in the audience, he refuses to give in and manages to defeat his opponent. Matt is proud of his father's triumph but the celebration is short-lived. Sweeny has one of his thugs gun down and murder Matt's father following the fight.

Matt graduates from law school and sets up a law office with Foggy Nelson. Then he begins planning to bring his father's killers to justice.

A YELLOW MAN WITHOUT FEAR?

In order to bring his father's killers to justice, Matt works outside the law. So as not to imperil his legal career, he creates a costume of black and yellow. Years ago his classmates had taunted Matt with the nickname "daredevil" because of his involvement with books to the exclusion of sports. Now Matt chooses this name to operate under in his costumed identity.

Daredevil interrupts a poker game in a room over the gym which The Fixer operates out of. He tries questioning the men about Sweeny/The Fixer but they respond by attempting to throw him out. Daredevil mops the place up with the hoods. When the Fixer and his thugs show up (including Slade, the trigger man in Battling Murdock's death), Sweeny trips DD up by pulling a rug out from under him. The Fixer and Slade attempt to flee. Daredevil follows the smell of cigar smoke to the subway where he brings Slade down with a billy club. Attempting to escape is too much for The Fixer, who succombs to a heart attack.

When this origin is told in flashback in issue 164, some details are altered. The major change has DD fighting Slade in the gym's boxing ring. There he beats him up.

Initially, Daredevil's costume includes electronics in the headpiece which enhance his senses, but this is soon discarded as being unnecessary. The billy club contains various devices to aid him, including a line he can use to swing from buildings ala Spider-Man.

While Daredevil's heightened senses enable him to *see* in the dark, detect when someone is behind him and tell what an opponent is going to do by the sound of their heartbeat, this is the extent of his powers. Matt Murdock's reflexes were already well trained at the time of the accident. He had been doing weight training (which today would be referred to as being a strength athlete). Unlike Spider-Man and others, DD did not gain any superstrength from his accident.

Daredevil's black and yellow costume lasts only six issues. During that time he battles some new villains created just for him—The Owl, The Purple Man, The Matador and The Fellowship of Fear. DD encounters two of Spider-Man's foes fairly early. The Ox appears in issue 6 and Electro (who first appeared in **Spider-Man** 9) is the first super-villain that DD ever faces, in **Daredevil** 2.

Artists changed quickly on the early issues of **DD** as Bill Everett drew issue one (except for the cover and splash page which are by Jack Kirby), Joe Orlando and Vince Colletta crafted issues 2-4 and then, with issue five, Wally Wood took over. Wood was a major artistic force in comics in the Fifties and Sixties. In the Fifties he specialized in sci fi and horror comics, especially those of EC, but he also did occasional work for Atlas. In the Sixties he created the Thunder Agents for Tower, short stories for **Creepy** and **Eerie** and other publishers and landed back at Marvel for a short time. His art has influenced many modern comics talents and he's the all-time favorite comic book artist of a lot of fans. He almost always inked his own work. When he inked the pencils of other artists, the work was transformed so that it looked like his own.

What Wally Wood brought to his brief stint on **Daredevil** (issues 5-11) was a committment to excellence. The changes began in issue 5 when he began redesigning DD's costume. The single "D" chest emblem was replaced with two overlapping Ds—but that still didn't make the costume very exciting. More changes would follow.

Before they did, Daredevil met Spider-Man for the first time (in the pages of **Spider-Man** 16). Still in his old costume, Daredevil had to battle a Spidey hypnotized by The Ringmaster (you'd think they would have taken away his hat after **Incredible Hulk** 3). Because DD is blind, he's unaffected by the Ringmaster's talent. He finally frees Spider-Man from the spell and together they take on the Circus of Crime.

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DAREDEVIL

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A NEW LOOK

In issue 7 (April 1965), Daredevil was given his new costume, one designed by Wood. That costume exists unchanged to this day over twenty years later, something that can't be said about a lot of characters! It stands as a lasting tribute to Wally Wood, who died in 1982.

The only thing that changes on Daredevil's costume, depending upon who's drawing it, is the color scheme. It is supposed to be all red, but beginning with Wood himself, it was drawn with so many shadows that it seemed to be red and black. Some have interpreted in this way. The chest area has often been drawn as black except for the DD which shows up as red against black. But the costume is actually all red.

To introduce the new costume and get things off with a bang, DD battles the Sub-Mariner in issue 7. Since Namor has superstrength and DD doesn't, Daredevil didn't exactly beat Subby up. Rather it was DD's valor in battle against impossible odds that impressed Namor.

Then Daredevil underwent one of his best adventures, but not in his own title. In **Fantastic Four** 39 ("And A Blind Man Shall Lead Them"). The FF have lost their powers. Upon returning to New York, they find that Doctor Doom has taken over the Baxter Building and all of its defenses. While trying to penetrate their headquarters, they encounter Daredevil. This teamup continues into issue 40 and remains one of the best stories in the history of the FF. This marks the first time the FF loses their powers, heightening its impact. As a side note, in FF 39 the figures of Matt Murdock and Daredevil were inked by Wally Wood over Jack Kirby's pencils, but in FF 40 this was not repeated.

Issue 8 introduces Stilt-Man and repeats the same cover motif as issue 7 featuring a newspaper headline in one corner telling who DD was battling.

Issue 9 features a story in which we're led to believe that Matt might be able to get his sight back—but it is all for naught.

These early issues of **Daredevil** feature Matt's secretary, Karen Page. They secretly love each other, but neither will admit it. They finally do break the ice and have a relationship which breaks up when she leaves in issue 86, taking with her the knowledge that Matt is Daredevil. Karen would not re-enter his life until issue 226 when writer Frank Miller reveals that her movie career has been less than savory.

Issue 12 of **Daredevil** features the return of Ka-Zar, his next appearance after his premiere in **X-Men** 10. This story runs through issue 14. A new artist, John Romita, took over the book. Jack Kirby contributed to issues 12 & 13. The cover of 13 is a classic Kirby rendering of Daredevil against a John Romita background,which ties it into the story in that issue.

Spider-Man and Daredevil have a return engagement in issues 16 & 17. Spidey thinks that DD has gone bad because thugs have been impersonating the Man Without Fear (Doesn't Spidey remember when Mysterio pulled the same thing on him back in issue 13?). This marks John Romita's first work on Spider-Man appearing prior to his taking over that title with issue 39.

VILLAINS GALORE

Issue 18 introduces The Gladiator, a strong, well-armored villain who wears razor sharp spinning metal discs on his wrists. The Gladiator was a vicious adversary who kept cropping up to confront DD (such as in issue 23 and in **Daredevil Annual** 1). Interestingly, this turned out to be one of those rare villains who reform despite a long career tackling superheroes, including Iron Man. Gladiator also appears in issue 166, but reforms after that. He is later victimized by Bullseye.

Since every hero seems to lose his powers sooner or later over at Marvel, Daredevil loses his radar sense in issue 30. DD is up against the Cobra and Mr. Hyde (two of

Thor's most interesting villains from the early days of his title) but is unable to fully deal with them until he regains his powers in issue 32.

The worst comes when DD once again meets with Doctor Doom, in issues 36-38. That arrogant armored adversary isn't happy with DD for having sided with the FF against him earlier. Doctor Doom is the type that bears a grudge. In DD 37 he repays our hero by exchanging bodies with him (just as Doom did with Mr. Fantastic way back in FF 10). Doom finds Daredevil's body with its enhanced vision (Doom doesn't perceive it as blindness) much to his liking, but the exchange is reversed in 38.

Another new artist had taken over **Daredevil** with issue 20, Gene Colan. Colan came to be the one artist most identified with **Daredevil** over the years. That is, until Frank Miller made the title his own years later.

When the series reached 50, Marvel didn't note the achievement in any special way. There is nothing particularly noteworthy about the issue, although in retrospect we mark it as one of the earliest appearances of fan-favorite comic artist Barry Windsor Smith. He drew issues 50-52.

Issue 57, written by Roy Thomas and drawn by Gene Colan and Syd Shores, features the story in which Matt Murdock reveals his Daredevil identity to Karen Page. He will pay dearly for this mistake years later when the Kingpin purchases that information from a man representing a down-and-out, drug-addicted Karen Page.

The title entered a slack period for a time around 1970, its stories only picking up when he becomes involved with The Black Widow. She proves so popular that the title changes to **Daredevil and the Black Widow** for issues 92-107. With issue 108 she leaves the series as co-star, remaining in San Francisco while Matt Murdock returns to his old stamping grounds of New York City.

Issue 100 marked Gene Colan's last but is at least a special anniversary noted on the cover. It features DD and a rogues gallery of his most menacing foes.

The book slid into second string status. With the exception of 116 by Gene Colan, Bob Brown became the regular penciller.

John Buscema drew issues 136 & 137 while John Byrne & Jim Mooney were the artists on 138. A variety of talents began drawing the title. No one remained with it long enough to be termed a regular penciller. These artists include Sal Buscema, Gil Kane, Bob Brown, Lee Elias, George Tuska, Carmine Infantino, Frank Robbins and Gene Colan.

The stories got much better during this period under scripter Roger McKenzie when a new artist took over the title. This artist's stint would be longer than any other penciller's had been for awhile. He began collaborating with McKenzie on the scripts and finally became the writer as well as the penciller.

MILLER TIME

On the splash page of issue 158, Marvel made a prophetic statement: "From time to time a truly great new artist will explode upon the Marvel scene like a bombshell! Newcomer lanky Frank Miller is just such an artist!" In the mighty Marvel Age of hyperbole, this time they were right. In fact, no other recent artist has made such an impact on comics.

Several issues later the fever gripped fandom. In the meantime, a fill-in appeared in issue #162, written by Michael Fleisher and drawn by Steve Ditko. Although good, it was flawed as it featured an amnesiac Matt Murdock who becomes a prize fighter—and during the entire time no one asks his name or realizes there's anything wrong with him.

In issue 163, the plot thread involving reporter Ben Urich piecing together the fact that Matt is Daredevil strenghtens. The story has DD tangle with the Hulk. But since DD is by no means n the Hulk's class, he just tries to keep from being killed while reasoning with the man-brute. He succeeds but is hospitalized. This is where the next issue picks up.

"Expose" opens with Matt's returned lover, the Black Widow, comforting him in the hospital. Ben Urich bursts in and confronts him with his evidence. Matt doesn't deny it. There is a slightly revised recap of DD's origin. The conclusion has Urich deciding not to do the story, and thus cementing an important link to Matt Murdock. This continues into the later Miller period.

With issue 165, Miller became the acknowledged coplotter on the book. When he became the sole scripter with issue 168, things began to happen fast. Elektra is introduced and a hitherto unknown page in Matt's past is writ for the first time. In 170, Miller brings the Kingpin into the saga. Daredevil's life has never been the same since. In issue 181, Elektra dies. In 190 she is resurrected, unknown to Matt. He won't learn of her return from the grave until the Elektra graphic novel.

Issue 191 was Miller's last for a time, and a powerful exit.

Miller returned briefly for issue 219 as cover artist and writer. Although he didn't handle the interior art he did show he could write a strange, offbeat tale. Matt Murdock is the protagonist and he never dons his DD duds.

David Mazzucchelli joined the book as artist after that. His presence helped to convince Miller to return as writer with issue 227 where he remained until 235. When Mazzuchelli left the book after 233, Miller decided that without his talented collaborator, he didn't wish to remain.

During his stint on the book, Miller was considered the artist for that character. He even drew DD's appearances in alternate universe stories in **What If?** issues 28 and 35.

Miller's return to **Daredevil** on issues 227-235 feature some of the finest writing ever to grace a comic book page. Clearly inspired by film noir, hard-boiled detective thrillers and sheer committment to portraying genuine human conflict, Miller's writing is so unique in comic books that, once again, it was almost impossible for anyone to follow. The periods after Miller's two stints on the book have been marked by a dull greyness and a complete lack of real direction. A creative team with vision and guts is needed to reclaim the spirit that Miller was able to infuse into the hero.

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